

Jesus spent 40 days in the desert; we join him there each Lent. Saint Mark's account of this period is much shorter than the ones in Matthew and Luke. But it still offers us guidance as we begin this season of discipline, penance and self-denial.

Mark says the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert. It wasn't Jesus' idea. He felt a force compel him to leave the world behind. When we begin Lent each year, it isn't our idea. The Church's calendar just hands it to us. Some inner force compels us to do penance because we believe that God is at work especially during this season.

Mark says Jesus remained in the desert 40 days. Once the Spirit got him there, Jesus stayed for a long time. He sets an example for us. The next 40 days should feel like a desert. Now that God has brought us to this special time, we accept it, and we find ways to survive in the desert. Most people do without something during Lent, just as Jesus did without his regular home, friends, food and water for 40 days. I asked one priest friend, "What are you giving up for Lent this year?" He said, "My microwave. Well," he explained, "it broke. So I'm trying to spend a few weeks preparing more nutritious food." If you do without some things especially for a period like 40 days, you will learn more about your compulsions and your needs, as well as your dependence upon God for all that you have. The less we have, the less distracted we are, the more we learn about ourselves, and the more we encounter God.

But we will encounter something else. Mark says that Jesus was tempted by Satan. He is the adversary, the prince of demons. He opposes the word of God, and he leads disciples astray from the path. If you try to spend 40 days giving up some comforts, I will guarantee you, you will encounter the temptations of Satan. You will be tested. You will indulge in other ways to pamper yourself because you are giving up so much; you will be harder to get along with. If you are miserable during your Lent, you're going to make everybody else miserable during theirs. It is the work of Satan.

The best way to combat these temptations is through prayer and charity. When we are charitable toward others, our temptations lose their strength. And when we pray, really pray about the temptations we face, we will draw closer to God and find the strength we need to overcome our sin.

Plan now to make a good confession sometime during the season of Lent. Confessions will be available **[before and after mass on Saturdays]** **[after mass]** from now till Easter; we will have our parish communal penance service on Monday night of Holy Week, April 6. If those times do not work, you can call any priest around the area; we will be happy to hear your confession at a time that is convenient for you. Admitting our sin is the first step in the fight against evil.

Lent is a time of temptation, but it is also a time of grace if we imitate Jesus and fight off the things that keep us from God.