

## 1st Sunday of Lent

**My best teachers pushed me to do more than I wanted to do or I thought I could do. They assigned homework that took hours to complete. They made me pay attention in class, think differently, and speak up amid the judgment of my peers. Learning isn't always fun, and many students achieve goals not on their own initiative, but only because they finally listened to a teacher who gave them an extra push.**

**We don't know much about Jesus' teachers, but two gospels tell us he began his ministry not on his own initiative. In John, Jesus worked his first miracle only after his mother coaxed him at the wedding in Cana. In Mark, Jesus first preached only after the Spirit coaxed him into the desert. Mark opens his account of our Savior's adult life with this striking statement: "The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert." Otherwise, perhaps, Jesus would have stayed in Nazareth to play with friends, help at home, and continue an unremarked life. He did not enter the desert on his own initiative. The Spirit drove him there.**

**Mark describes the temptation with very few words: "[Jesus] remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him." Our pandemic has been with us almost a full year. Forty days in the desert sounds like a pretty good deal. We feel as though we've been in the desert 340 days already.**

**And now, here comes Lent. Like the Spirit who drove Jesus into the desert, the Church is driving us into another wilderness for 40 days. As we did the previous 340 days, we will encounter Satan and his temptations, wild beasts that threaten our physical and emotional well being, and angels who help.**

**A good way to begin this Lent is to review how we've handled the pandemic. Like a teacher who pushed us, like the Spirit who drove Jesus into the desert, the pandemic has made us encounter ourselves. We have discovered our deepest yearnings, and how we act when they go unmet. We have learned what we would really do if we only had more time. We have seen how careful or careless we are with our own health and the health of others.**

**Now as the number of infections diminishes, lest we let down our guard, we enter Lent. Like a good teacher, Lent pushes us to accomplish something more, to embrace this season within a season. The three primary disciplines of Lent are well known: prayer, fasting and almsgiving.**

**Consider prayer: Since the pandemic began, how has your prayer changed? Are you happy with it? Does it need to change again?**

**Consider fasting: Since the pandemic began, how has your diet changed? How have you used your spare time? If the Spirit is driving you into the desert to fast, what do you need to fast from? Food? Drink? Entertainments?**

**Consider almsgiving: Since the pandemic began, where have you given your time, talent and treasure? Has it been enough? Should you be doing more?**

**We begin this Lent like adolescents entering a classroom. We may not want to be here. We may not have much fun. But we grow the most when we heed the best. Our teacher right now is the Spirit who drives us out ready or not into Lent.**