

Lenten Mission 2021 – First Conference:

Expectations and preparations

(the Lord, the Evangelists, the Saints, and Bishop Robert Barron, Fr. Mike Toups, Fr. Mike Schmitz, Deacon Larry Oney and Fr. Ken Sampson)

During Lent we accompany the Lord on the journey from the Jordan to Jerusalem. We all have our expectations of this journey. The Lord had his expectations, the Apostles had theirs and we have ours. Today we will reflect on how the Lord prepared for his journey and how we, as his disciples, are called to prepare in order to accompany him.

Opening Prayer and Welcome:

As we begin our Lenten journey. I want to say, “Welcome.”

As we begin the journey, it is important to start where we are at.

For some who are Lenten “veterans”, you may feel a sense of anticipation, especially if you have positive memories of past Lents. I just want to say, Welcome.

For some of us, as we begin the journey, we find ourselves desiring a renewal in our spiritual life. Maybe life just got busy and in the midst of it all there has been a “distancing” or there has just been a kind of spiritual atrophy and we just want to rekindle the flame. If so, I just want to say Welcome.

For some of us we just stumbled into this conversation, maybe curiosity or the invitation of some other soul, or maybe you just want “more”. If that is where you are, I just want to say Welcome.

Whether you feel close to God, or far away from God, whether you feel curious or whether you feel lead, as we begin the journey, I want to say, “Welcome.”

Each of those situations that I have just described are ways that we can say we want more in our spiritual life of just life itself.

A sign of your spiritual desire is your presence here.

Some of us are in a battle with sin – if that is where you are, I just want to say,
“We are in this together.”

or some particular sin, or some particular habit –

then, your presence here is a clear indication that you want to be free.

For some of us, it's the desire to be free of some fear or anxiety, some past experience or memory.

For some it's about life – a desire for something more, a deeper sense of fulfillment, or peace

For some of us, life has become a treadmill and Lent is about a hope for more energy, or a change of attitude, or a renewed enthusiasm for life.

If that is where you are, I just want to say, "Welcome."

Welcome - because there is "more". And God wants to give us/you more.

What if this Lent were different than all the other Lents?

This Lent is an opportunity

For a deeper encounter with God – who wants to give us everything we need.

He gave himself for us and wants to give himself to us.

And so, Lent is ultimately about opening our heart to receive what God wants to give us. A special gift of his Spirit that will bring, as we hear in Paul's Letter to the Galatians,

"... love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal. 5: 22-23) to our souls.

But, if, for Lent, we only do what we have always done,
we'll only get what we've always got.

And we will find ourselves on Easter Sunday with our lives no more changed than we were on Ash Wednesday.

So, if you need strength, or forgiveness, joy or mercy or peace - a deeper experience of his presence, then open your heart and let him in.

Come, walk with him these Lenten days on the way to Jerusalem because he wants to give us more than we would ask for or imagine.

So, let's pray.

So why are we here?

and because we **recognize** we need help

and we have **faith** that by following Jesus we will receive the help we need.

because **He** wants us here

So, welcome to the Lenten journey, with Jesus.

*Now, where there is **Expectation**, there is **Preparation!***

*We have reflected on our expectation, so now we reflect on our **Preparation.***

The first step of our preparation is look to Jesus. To try to enter into the journey with him as he experienced it. So, we have to reflect on our understanding of Jesus himself.

Christological background:

Jesus is the Eternal Son incarnate. Jesus is truly human. He took the fullness of our humanity to himself in a personal union, so that he is as fully human as any of us. This includes all dimensions of our humanity: body, soul, mind and emotions and all the psychological and physical attributes. His humanity went through all of the growth and processes that we experience. He was, as the Letter to the Hebrews reveals – like us in all things but sin.

This means that in his humanity he was truly a child. He did not have some divinely infused mental abilities in his childhood or adolescent mind. In his humanity, He grew in self-knowledge. We see this in the incident in the Temple, when he was 12 years old. After having, in his childhood, been told by Mary and Joseph the stories of the appearance of the angel and of Joseph's dream, he has come to understand he has a deeply personal relationship with the Father. "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"

In that moment Joseph knew he had done his work of helping Jesus to understand his foundational relationship with the Father. But the passage ends with "He returned with them to Nazareth and grew in wisdom and grace before God and men." He continued to grow in his self-understanding. Recall your own self-understanding at 12 or 18 or even 20. Only if we grasp how fully and truly human he is, can we understand the saving action of God in Jesus. Jesus is one of us as He is one with the Father and the Spirit. It is in this union in Jesus that we can be reconciled to God.

This is critical to understanding the beginning of his journey and our Journey with him from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

Jesus is guided/led by the Spirit to the Jordan to meet John the Baptist. In his humanity, the full reason for going to John and submitting to baptism may not have been clear but he discerned that this is what the Father desired and so it is right to do.

He reassures John of this when John expresses his hesitation, “I should be baptized by you.” In the moment of his submission Jesus experiences the anointing of the Spirit – who appeared to him as in the form of a dove and Jesus heard the voice of the Father say, “You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.” (Mk1:11)

In his humanity he experienced an affirmation of his identity and an anointing by the Spirit. In John’s gospel it says that John the Baptist saw the Spirit come down but it seems only Jesus heard the voice of the Father. The full experience and message were for him personally.

The beginning of the Journey: At the Jordan Luke 3:15-22

Now the people were filled with expectation,
and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah.
John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water,
but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs
of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire.
His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the
wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."
Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people. ...

After all the people had been baptized
and Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, heaven was opened
and the holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove.
And a voice came from heaven,
"You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

This reflection on the affirmation of his relationship with the Father and his anointing by the Spirit can also help us understand what happened in the desert. Again, "led by the Spirit" Jesus goes into the desert. He is led there for a time away, a time of reflection and **preparation**. Now having, in his humanity, experienced the depth of his relationship with the Father, he comes, in the desert, to understand his mission, his vocation, the mission for which he has been sent into the world - its character and its purpose.

In his 40 days in the desert, his human understanding is deepened and clarified and the commitment of his will to his mission and his Father's will is confirmed and strengthened.

This same preparation is offered to us in our lives and in our 40 days in the Lenten "desert."

So having been with him at the Jordan, now let us accompany him into the desert

Luke 4: 1-13

Filled with the holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil.

He ate nothing during those days, and when they were over he was hungry.

The devil said to him,

“If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.”

Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘One does not live by bread alone.’”

Then he took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a single instant. The devil said to him, “I shall give to you all this power and their glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I may give it to whomever I wish. All this will be yours, if you worship me.”

Jesus said to him in reply, “It is written:

‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.’”

Then he led him to Jerusalem, made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: ‘He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you,’ and:

‘With their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.’”

Jesus said to him in reply,

“It also says, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.’”

When the devil had finished every temptation, he departed from him for a time.

The 40 Days in the Desert - a time of Preparation – for reflecting on the character (manner and purpose) of his mission.

His human understanding “grows” in a depth and clarity as a result of his prayer and his will is strengthened by his self-discipline (ascetic practices). It is not clear when during these 40 days each of the temptations occurred but the Gospel’s bring the spiritual battles together in rapid sequence for our reflection.

The suggestion that Jesus turn the stones into bread to satisfy his hunger – Jesus reveals that he understands his mission was not one to satisfy the material cravings of the flesh nor for his own personal satisfaction. His mission was to address a deeper hunger. The hunger of the spirit that can only be satisfied by the word of the Lord, by the Truth that is the Lord’s love itself. This is what we truly hunger for. Hence the fasting and self-discipline of the flesh frees a soul to keep clearly in mind what the soul truly hungers for and this can strengthen our will to live life in this world without being a slave to its cravings.

The offer to make him ruler over all the kingdoms of the world. Luke 4:6 “I shall give all the power and the glory ...” Jesus reveals that his understanding of his mission is not for a kingdom based on worldly power. Jesus is not seeking dominion as Satan conceives it, where the ruler is feared for his capacity to force obedience. This is the mistaken conception revealed by James and John when they ask to sit at his right and his left when he comes into his Kingdom. Jesus rebukes them and reveals that his mission is one of service. The kingdom he has come to bring is one of compassion and love. And he seeks no glory for himself. Everything that Jesus does is to give glory to the Father, not to himself. Luke 4:8 “You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him alone shall you serve.” Jesus whole focus is on giving glory of the Father through his compassionate love of all the souls in the world.

The suggestion that he prove his relationship to the Father by casting himself from the parapet of the Temple, brings the response that one does “not put the Lord, your God to the test.” Jesus’ prayer-filled experience in the desert of his intimacy with the Father has become so profound that his understanding and his will are perfectly conformed to that of the Father loving plan, that he makes no demands of the Father but seeks in all things to do the will of the Father. He needs no testing of the Father’s love, for he has come to trust completely in the Father’s love for him and any initiative to “test” the Father’s love would be an unthinkable affront to the intimacy of their love for each other. For True lovers do not seek to “test” each other’s love.

He entered into the desert and disciplined his flesh to free his will from the fleshly cravings that would take control of his life. He fasted to free himself from those things of this world that would hold him back from completely committing himself to his mission.

And so, we follow his example - we fast to remind ourselves that ultimately the Kingdom we seek is not of this world.

He came to understand that the Kingdom would not come by coercion and domination but by an invitation offered in compassion and love. And so, he committed himself to give glory to the Father by serving those to whom he was sent. He gave all that he had, to the last drop of his blood, for us - and in this he glorified the Father.

And so, we are called to imitate his generous, self-giving service, to give “alms” of our time, and strength and resource so that other may see the goodness of God in what we do and give glory to the Father. The final judgement will be based on this. Matthew 25: 34-36 *Then the King will say to those on his right, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food. I was thirsty, and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.”* And to remind ourselves that the Kingdom is the gift of God’s mercy and we who have received his mercy are called to be instruments of that mercy.

And through his prayer during his 40 days in the desert, Jesus, in his human understanding and will, was drawn into the profoundly intimate love of the Son and the Father, so that he gave himself wholly over to the Father’s will. So that even in his human fear, he could say, “Not my will but thine be done.”

So – during Lent, we too must pray that we may make the words of the Our Father - “Thy will be done” our constant prayer. And to remind ourselves that we are wholly dependent on God, that our relationship with him is the very source of our life.

And so, in Lent we pray and fast and seek to serve those in need, knowing that if we desire to truly accompany him, not as spectators but as disciples, we must prepare as he did.

So we have come to the conclusion of this first day of our journey.

Perhaps it calls for some form of reflection on our Expectations and Preparation.

What are we hoping this Lent will bring?

How are our preparations going?

It is not too late begin or to renew our commitment.

Let us Pray:

Welcome to the Journey to Jerusalem. Hope you will join us again on Wednesday.