

Reflection on St. Mark's Gospel 1: 12-15

- *“The Kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel”*
- This one sentence at the conclusion of today's Gospel passage contains the whole message of this season of Lent. It is a message so critical, so central to our lives that it is worth examining these words closely.
- Simply put Jesus is telling us: there is a really great gift being held out for us to take; and something is preventing us from taking that gift; but that obstacle can be removed.
- The really great gift is the Kingdom of God. That kingdom is described to us in chapters two and three in the Book of Genesis. There we are told that God created us to have a particular type of relationship with Him. Open and Honest. We were in “paradise”. Things were created for us. We had no hunger, no sickness – no death. All of nature was in harmony. We were given free will. God walked in the garden with our first parents – they actually saw God! This is the Kingdom Jesus tells us is “at hand” – the Kingdom to which we invited back.
- But there is an obstacle in our way.
- So let's talk about that obstacle. It is called sin.
- In short, sin is a misuse of our free will. It is the false belief we can do whatever we choose. Sin ignores the fact that real freedom comes with responsibility. Real freedom seeks out and is guided by God's will.
- Sin entered the world when our first parents committed the sin of pride. They didn't trust God – thought they knew better. God told them what was good and bad and they chose not to trust Him. They put their will ahead of God's will and that fractured the relationship.

- We inherited that “original sin” from our first parents. It was a spiritual inheritance. While we are created good people by nature, we now have an inclination (a leaning) toward sin. It does not mean we are going to follow or act on that inclination, but we can and we will be tempted.
- We continue to commit personal sin each time we say “no” to the will of God. Each time we act on that inclination to sin, on that temptation, the obstacle keeping us from God’s Kingdom gets larger and larger.
- The good news is that sin is an obstacle that can be removed. There is a sure way!
- God, in His great love for us and great mercy toward us, promised to one day restore us to His kingdom. So God sent Jesus to lead us back. And God promised if we follow Jesus’ examples, and obey Jesus’ teachings and live the life He calls us to live – loving God and each other - we will return to that kingdom, that original relationship God intended for us.
- And that return to God’s kingdom has started already – at our Baptism when God forgave (washed away) original sin and sent us the grace, the strength, to take the first steps in becoming true followers of Jesus.
- To “believe in the Gospel” means as followers of Jesus we look to Him throughout our lives to guide us past the obstacles that separate us from God’s kingdom.
- And what better guide? Jesus knows the world we live in. He lived here too! He knows that temptation is part of this world – it is unavoidable.
- Temptation is not a sin. Acting on that temptation is!!
- In today’s Gospel passage we read of the devil’s temptation of Jesus.
- While St. Mark’s Gospel doesn’t go into much detail about Jesus’ temptation, other Gospel writers (Matthew

and Luke) go into greater detail to show us Jesus was tempted in every way we are tempted.

- Tempted to doubt God would provide for our basic needs. (*Your hungry Jesus, tell God to turn this stone into bread for you*).
- Tempted to test God's love rather than trust it. (*If God really loves you Jesus, jump from the top of this temple, God will save you-if He loves you*).
- Tempted to desire material riches and to forget God . (*All of these riches will be yours Jesus- if you worship me*).
- Don't we face these same types of temptations? There will be people, situations and things that try to separate us from God; that cause us to question, even act contrary to God's will.
- Advertisers flood us with commercials trying to convince us we need this or that product. When we think we need more than God provides we begin to give into temptation. Things start to replace God.
- Jesus knows the struggles we face. He reminds us to stand strong against temptation and to trust in God. In God's love and protection and promises.
- Jesus teaches us we will be tempted – but we don't have to give in. Jesus shows us by His own example that each temptation we resist, makes us stronger, better followers and clears out another obstacle separating us from God.
- Jesus tells us the key to standing strong is to trust in God's word. Trust God loves you, cares about you, walks with you – that is the “believing in the Gospel” Jesus speaks of in today's reading.
- It is interesting to compare the temptation of Eve in the garden to that of Jesus' in the desert. Both were tempted by the devil to question God's word; question God's love

for them. Both were tempted to act contrary to God's will. Eve did. Jesus didn't. What was the difference?

- Eve entertained the temptation. She thought about it, interacted with the tempter, listened seriously. That led her to doubt. She felt pity about what she "couldn't have". That is when she started to give in.
- Jesus, on the other hand, shut temptation down at the starting gate. He shut down the dialogue and shoved temptation right back at the devil. Jesus trusted in God's word and used those words to stay strong. He never doubted.
- The season of Lent calls us to intensify our efforts to grow stronger in faith and trust in God's word. Lent calls us to look closely at Jesus' life to see how He grew in trust.
- And when we do look closely, we see Jesus doing three very particular things that strengthened Him – things the season of Lent calls us to focus on: Prayer, Fasting and Acts of Charity.
- Prayer. Before every important event in Jesus' life we see Him going off by himself to a quiet place to pray. It is how Jesus charged His battery. It is where He went for comfort and guidance.
- Jesus tells us to pray constantly. He tells us to ask, seek, knock and we won't be disappointed. Prayer builds a relationship with God our loving Father. No relationship can exist without communication. Think of anyone you love or care for – don't you tell them so?
- Jesus prayed and calls us to pray; to ask God to guide us and focus us and change us into the person He wants us to be.
- Fasting. Jesus also fasted. Not as an endurance contest, but with a purpose. To grow spiritually so that material things, even the basic necessities, would not own Him.

Fasting helped Jesus and will help us to build up our willpower.

- Charity. Throughout Jesus' life we see acts of love and charity toward others. Jesus calls us to focus outward on others rather than inward on ourselves. It involves stepping outside of ourselves, our own worries and diverting that energy to love and care for others. There are so many ways to do this. We can visit or call someone who is homebound or struggling with a heavy burden. We can donate food and our time to food pantries. There are countless charitable organizations in need of volunteers. The possibilities to bring the love of God to others are endless. And when those in need receive this love and support their trust in God grows stronger.
- So as we enter the season of Lent, let's respond to our Lord's call to repent, change our lives and remove those obstacles that stand between God and us. Let's get even better at resisting temptation so that come Easter Sunday we can say: "Something has changed in me for the better. I am not the same person I was at the start of Lent. I'm stronger. I'm living the Gospel a little better. I am a bit closer to the Kingdom of God!"