

FEBRUARY 18, 2018

First Sunday of Lent

Reading 1 [GN 9:8-15](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9](#).

R. (cf. 10) Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Reading 2 [1 PT 3:18-22](#)

Gospel [MK 1:12-15](#)

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him. After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

HOMILY:

In 1973, due to a downturn in the economy because of our country's last experience of severe gas shortages and even gas-rationing, our family was suddenly faced with the need to relocate or else my father would lose his job. In the Spring of 1974, we learned that, if Dad was to keep a job, we'd need to relocate from our native state of Michigan to Delaware.

This surprise relocation led to quite a number of long trips across the 600 miles from the East Coast back to see our relatives. These trips have become legend in our family's lore. 600 miles—about 10-12 hours of driving—was a long trip for three young teenagers and their parents! These trips were not without some bickering between the siblings, with a bit of a battle of the wills between our worthy navigator, my dad, and the passengers, who were bored, restless, and too often looking for a break. And for my father, the optimal number of times for a break on our trip was: as few as possible! My mother was a begrudging co-conspirator in this scheme. She'd pack a large bag of sandwiches, various snacks, but not too many drinks (you know what those do!), which would be judiciously dispensed across the trip to keep us happy the entire trip. It would take a near revolution, with sympathetic intercession from my mother, before a rest stop was permitted. There were not a few times when we kids just could not see the reason behind our navigator's plan! The back-seat drivers could not come to terms with the unreasonableness of the front seat one!

While these trips often seemed quite a drama for us kids, in fact we were in good hands. Dad knew that the sooner each trip was over, the better, and mom knew what to bring along for necessary food for the journey. By every estimation, we were in secure hands for each drive back home. These drives, for me, have come to be seen as an image of the journey of the life of faith. And primary in this comparison is the truth that, like in a family trip, there are two drivers that need to come together if happiness is to be found along the way. And it will be the back-seat driver, me, who will need to come to follow the lead of the One in front!

You may have noticed at the entrances of our church and in your mailboxes at home, a card with a desert image and the word "DRIVEN" blazoned across it. It takes its inspiration from the words of today's gospel on this First Sunday of the season of Lent, this season of final preparation for you all. There, the gospel writer Mark records, "The Spirit **drove** Jesus out into

the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.” While in this gospel Jesus is driven by the spirit into the desert, in a fuller sense, God in Christ is driven across eternity and since each of us was born, to draw close to you and call constantly at your heart to come on his journey to the fullness of eternal life, a journey that begins now. Along our travels, we may often be unaware or asleep to his promptings. In this Lenten season, we want to become more aware that the Lord is driving us and we, in response, are driven toward Him. And, by traveling together with other believers and along His way, we are reminded that we are not alone in our lives of faith and, beginning with each of our baptisms we are elect, chosen by God, and will be given all you need in this Communion of Saints. As the angels “ministered” to Jesus in the harshness of the desert, so too the spiritual riches of the Church are always ready to nourish and strengthen our faith, as long as we remain where this strength is offered.

As it turns out, in our life of faith, there are two necessary drivers: Jesus and me. Jesus is driven, not just into the desert, but all along the way to his Cross and Resurrection, that you might have that for which you were created—the way to a life in abundance, a life in Christ. At the same time, each of us possesses a driven heart. We want *something*, always and at each moment of our lives and we are grasping after it. We too are driven to find happiness, peace, and satisfaction in life. But, darn it, too often we are driven towards things that cannot deliver this life. And yet, we keep trying the same old tired things that cannot satisfy. But this is how we were created: persons with hearts searching, but more importantly, with hearts being sought by the driving love of God.

May we discover anew, through our spiritual practices of prayer, fasting, and sacrifices during this season of Lent, that there are two necessary drivers across the path of our lives. Divine love is driving towards us and is with us across the course of our lives, while we too are driven to find happiness. On our parts, our Lenten practices of prayer, fasting, and sacrifice are meant to help us see if what drives us can bring this happiness. In the end, unless we are driving in God’s direction and not another way, we’re going to remain frustrated. Frustrated? Maybe a change in direction is required—and it will be a u-turn: a turn away from your way God’s way. Let’s come and receive the driving, persistent Love of God, that gives all we need across this journey of each of our lives. Look—He’s drawing close to us to show us the way, driven to give us Life in the Eucharist we’re about to share. May we be driven to follow his way more closely.