

The theme for Lent 2018 Take Forty...

The forty days actually begins today.

This week's theme is: Take forty: Does God Drive you?

Let the Spirit drive you into the desert!

The story of Jesus' life in Mark's gospel today is almost staccato.

- **He enters the Jordan to be baptized.**
- **Almost before he breaks the water's surface he hears the voice saying to him, "You are my beloved son" and the Spirit of God descends upon him.**
- **This radically joyous news is followed by something very odd. There is no time to celebrate his Father's love for him. No time to give witness to others as happens in the other gospels. Jesus is DRIVEN into the desert to face the temptations.**
- **JESUS TAKES 40!**

The desert scene is VERY different in Mark's gospel than in the other gospel accounts. There are no accounts of the three temptations to hunger, pride or power by Satan. We only read that Satan is tempting him and angels are ministering to him.

After coming out of the desert, he hears that John, the Baptist has been arrested and Jesus immediately begins to announce that the Kingdom of God is among them; repent and believe!

What are we to make of this fast-moving episode of Jesus' public life?

Maybe it could be best compared to someone chosen to be on the Olympic team for your country. Would you waste much time going out and celebrating? Maybe for a quick minute, but the Spirit of the Olympics drives you to excellence!

Once you have been chosen as an athlete, you enter into an intense time of preparation.

- **Athletes often give up or put off important activities:**
 - **There are sacrifices to be made.**
 - **They put off marriages,**
 - **delay finishing school,**
 - **set aside pursuing a career in business.**
- **They study their sport, often reading up and watching videos of the professionals in their sport.**
- **They practice their skills day and night.**

- They keep strict diets and exercise.
- Gather with other athletes in centers.

Well, my brothers and sisters, we have been chosen to be members of God's Olympic team.

We know our Good News: We are loved by the Father! And we are called, as athletes of God to give witness to God's love in our world.

And so the Spirit DRIVES us into the desert for 40 days to prepare ourselves for our witness in our hostile world.

We too need to study, to reflect on the fact that we are loved. We need to enter into prayer this season.

- Black Book,
- Scripture,
- Generations of Faith

We need to gather with others in our Olympic Spiritual Center:

- Mass;
- Stations of the Cross,
- Emmaus Faith Sharing Groups, to reflect on our calling.

We, athletes for God and witnesses of his Good News, need to give up things which turn us away from loving God and neighbor: food, drink, false pleasures, too much electronics.

We need to practice our skills of loving: charity to others: Lenten soup luncheon, Rice Bowls, special donations.

(PAUSE)

When someone is chosen an Olympian athlete, they often get a new coach.

St. Mark's Gospel tells us that our new coach is the very Spirit of God. Allow that Spirit to DRIVE you into the desert of Lent this year to strengthen you against the onslaught of evil. Enter into the training regimen of fasting, prayer and giving to those in need so that you may be well equipped to fight off Satan and witness to God's Good News for all creation.

My sisters and brothers, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Good News.

Yes, indeed, it is time to TAKE 40 FOR THE LORD!