

A painting of a man in a white robe walking through a desert landscape, framed by a white, torn-edge border. The man is seen from behind, walking away from the viewer on a rocky path. He is wearing a long white robe and a head covering. The landscape is arid, with brown and tan hills and sparse green vegetation. The sky is a pale, hazy blue. The overall style is that of a religious or historical painting.

# *The Way Through the Desert*

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FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

## Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus,

*As we journey through this Lenten season,  
help us place our trust in you.*

*You are the way, the truth and the life.*

*Allow our hearts to open fully to your word  
so that we may encounter you and know  
you intimately.*

*Jesus, I trust in you. Lead me in your way.*

*Amen.*

**First Reading:** *Deuteronomy 26: 4 - 10*

When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labour on us, we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.

## Responsorial Psalm:

 **Track 1** Week 1 Psalm 90

**R. Be with me, Lord, when I am in trouble.**

He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High,  
and abides in the shade of the Almighty,  
says to the LORD, "My refuge,  
my stronghold, my God in whom I trust!" **R.**

Upon you no evil shall fall,  
no plague approach your tent.  
For you has he commanded his angels  
to keep you in all your ways. **R.**

They shall bear you upon their hands,  
lest you strike your foot against a stone.  
On the lion and the viper you will tread,  
and trample the young lion and the serpent. **R.**

Since he clings to me in love, I will free him,  
protect him, for he knows my name.  
When he calls on me, I will answer him;  
I will be with him in distress;  
I will deliver him and give him glory. **R.**

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**Second Reading:** *Romans 10:8 - 13*

But what does it say? “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses

with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, “No one who believes in him will be put to shame.”

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

## LECTIO DIVINA ON THE GOSPEL TEXT

1. Hear the Gospel twice, with a pause in between each reading. What does the text say?  
*Silent reflection (3 minutes); then share a brief initial thought.*

**GOSPEL:** Luke 4:1-13

### Track 2 Week 1 Gospel

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying 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 protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

2. Meditation – What does the text say to me?  
*Silent reflection on text (3-5 minutes); then share and discuss your insights with the group.*
3. Prayer – What do I want to say to God about the text?  
*Personal silent prayer, responding to God (3-5 minutes)*
4. Action - What difference will this text make in my life?  
*Silent reflection to select a word or phrase (1 minute); then share chosen word or phrase with the group*

Refer to pp 10-11 for more detail

# Reflection

*Fr David Callaghan MGL*

## Track 3 Week 1 Reflection

This might sound strange and possibly a little bit heretical, but every time you sin, your heart is preaching to you about the reality of heaven. Deep within our hearts, there is a memory of what life should be. Our sin comes from that deep hunger inside of us that is constantly craving something more. We do everything in our power to fill this emptiness through our pursuit of success, power, security and love. When we fail to fill that hunger, things often turn ugly. Relationships fall apart, anger takes over and we are prepared to compromise everything for the sake of a simple bit of pleasure. Every time you sin, your heart is proclaiming to you that this thing or this experience is not what you were made for. That hunger deep within your heart is saying that you are made for more than anything this world can provide.

Even though we never lived in the Garden of Eden, it is as though there is a memory of that paradise echoing at the core of our being. That memory haunts us and drives every decision we make in life. The reason we sin is because we are trying to reach that place of joy and peace in the shortest and fastest way possible. The problem is that we remember the 'feeling' of Eden, but we

have forgotten what it was that created that peace and joy. The reason why Adam and Eve experienced such joy was not because of where they lived or the things they had, but because they lived in constant worship of God. At every moment, they were aware of the love that was being given through the gift of creation and they found their joy in constantly thanking God for his love.

When Jesus walks into the desert he is showing humanity how to return to this place of paradise. We have convinced ourselves that paradise is to be found by trying to fill that emptiness within us through any means possible; Jesus shows that paradise is to be found by walking in the completely opposite direction. He intentionally chooses to be empty. He embraces his hunger and finds his joy in the love of the Father.

The devil tempts him in the same way that we are tempted by saying 'Do not trust God but trust in your own strength and steal what you need'. Jesus responds by saying that true joy is to be found only by worshiping the Lord and trusting that his love will provide for your deepest need.

When we look over the whole story of the people of Israel, we see this same battle being played out in every generation. They were constantly tempted to fill that need with other things or by worshiping other gods. Even when they tried to worship God, their focus was more on the external

things rather than on letting themselves simply be loved by God. God was constantly speaking to Israel through the prophets that even in their rituals and sacrifices, they were missing the point. Their hearts were not really trusting, and they were not able to simply rest in the love of God.

The challenge facing the Church today is whether we can enter back into a relationship of real love and worship of God. There has always been a temptation to build the strength of the Church upon money, power or influence and rely upon human means to solve the problems of the world. The question is whether we can follow Christ into that desert place and realise that our true strength comes from the love of God. Just as Jesus showed us the way back to paradise by walking into the desert, the Church has an opportunity to speak this same truth to a world that is being driven insane because of its deep spiritual hunger.

### Reflection Questions

1. The above reflection states that Adam and Eve's joy was not because of where they lived or the things they had, but because they lived in constant worship of God. How are we called to constantly worship God and is it possible in today's world?
2. The way of Jesus leads us into the desert. Fr Callaghan says, "Jesus shows that paradise is to be found by walking in the completely opposite direction." How does this statement speak to you?
3. When you look at your own story, when have you been able to show deep trust in God?

### Closing Prayer

*Loving Jesus,*

*Thank you for the gift of your unwavering love, even at those times that we choose not to turn to you. Help us through these Lenten days to look for you and towards you. Help us to recognise the barrenness in our lives is an absence of you, and that turning towards you with trust will give our heart a stillness that only you can give.*

*In your name we pray,*

*Amen.*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit. As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, Amen.*

### Personal reflection during the week:

Can I identify times that I am focusing on external things rather than making time for Jesus? How can I be more aware of moments that I can give to Jesus to develop a closer and more trusting relationship with him and allow myself to be simply loved by him?