

Into the Desert: Purging Sin, Urging Love

(Thanks to Mother Nadine, Superior of the Intercessors of the Lamb,
for much of this information)

I. Something New

- A. Most of the time, when I go to a restaurant, I order the same thing. Once I've found an entrée I like, I hate to order anything different for fear that I won't like it. I broke this rule one time in New Orleans. I went out to eat at a restaurant in the French Quarter with a group of my seminary friends. I saw an intriguing hamburger on the menu and decided to break out of the ordinary and try something new. As I ordered the "peanut butter, Canadian bacon burger" the waitress just stared at me. She told me that no one had ever ordered that burger before. Even the manager came out to see what I looked like. By the time the burger came, I didn't have a lot of confidence that it was going to taste very good. And it didn't. It was one of the worst things I've ever eaten.
- B. Most of us are very cautious about trying something new, and for good reason. We have more than once been disappointed by something new. So we're a little cautious when God tells us He wants to do something new in our lives. And that's the message we heard in last week's first reading (Isaiah 43:18-19).
- C. God wants to give us something new (and it doesn't have peanut butter on it)! We hear this message in several places in the Bible.
1. Isaiah 43:18-19, as mentioned above.
 2. Ezekiel 36:25-28

"I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

2. This theme is elaborate on in today's Gospel reading (Mark 2:18-22), which tells us that we can't try to hold on to the old while receiving something new. To do so would be like sewing a new piece of clothe to an old garment or putting new wine into an old wineskin. If we try to hold on to the old while God does something new in our lives, we'll end up losing both the new and the old.

II. What does God want to do?

- A. In order to find out more precisely what God wants to do in our lives, we can look to today's first reading from Hosea (2:16b-22).
1. God wants to do for us what He did for the Israelites thousands of years ago. God led them, fed them, and wed them. He **led** them forth from bondage and slavery into the desert (an important image), and **fed** them with manna from the sky (foreshadowing of the Eucharist), and **wed** them ("I will espouse you to me forever" Hosea 2:19).
 2. He wants to lead us out of slavery and unite Himself to us in a covenant of love.
 3. Throughout the Season of Lent, we're going to be looking at how God accomplishes this. We are going to look at the bondage and slavery that He wants to free us from; we will look more specifically at the seven capital sins that enslave us. And we will look at the loving relationship that God calls us into as His betrothed.

III. The Battle

- A. God is calling you and I out of sin and into the desert. Lent is often described as a desert journey since it's modeled after the forty days and forty nights that Jesus spent in the desert preparing for his mission. We are being invited into the desert to continue preparing for the mission that God has for us. And what is this mission? To fight in the spiritual battle.
1. Just as Jesus' time in the desert prepared him to spiritually fight Satan's temptations, our time in the desert will prepare us to continue in this fight.
 2. We know as Christians that Jesus Christ has already won the Final Battle, but we also know that, as the Body of Christ, we must make the victory of that Battle present in our lives and in the lives of those around us.
 - a. Revelation 12:1-17
 - i. The woman in the sky is Mary, who has traditionally stood as an image, or archetype, of the Church. After giving birth to Jesus Christ (and now us, as the Body of Christ) she flees from the dragon (whose seven heads can represent the seven capital sins) by going into the "wilderness," or desert. The desert, then, is the battleground.
 - ii. Verse 17—"Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the *rest of her offspring*, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."

B. You and I are being called into battle as spiritual warriors for God.

1. Ephesians 6:10-12

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

2. Joel 3:9-10

“Proclaim this among the nations: prepare for war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, ‘I am a warrior.’”

IV. The Mission

A. Over the next seven weeks we’re going to look at the seven capital sins and how Satan tries to tempt us to turn from the Lord.

B. But the battle isn’t simply a defensive struggle against sin; it is also an offensive striving toward love.

1. Therefore, we won’t just look at recognizing sin, but also how to grow in love.
2. We are interested not only in dying to self (not sinning, Colossians 3:5- “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry”), but dying for others (love, John 15:13 “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”)
3. God wants to do something new in each and everyone of us. And we are given the great blessing of Lent to listen more closely to what He wants to do, and to answer His call more boldly. It says in Romans 9:17, “I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.”

“Let the weak say, ‘I am a warrior.’”