

## First Sunday of Lent

*March 9, 2025*

One day mother Carmel was approached by her son with some questions for clarifications. Mum, why is it that we have a hunch back whereas other animals do not have them? Son, the mother replied, "we're desert animals and the creator made us that way so that we are able to store water and nutrition for our long distant trekking on the desert".

As you know there comes a time when drinking water becomes scarce on the desert so we are made to survive long hours on the desert without getting thirsty. Okay, thanks mum.

The son continued with another probing question, Mum, "I see that we have a stick-like eye lashes on our eye-brows. Why that?" The mother responded that the desert is a sandy land mass and when the wind blows the sand, we use that to prevent the sand from getting into our eyes. Perfect, the son retorted. And why is it that we have a wide flat toes while other animals have a kind of pointed ones. The mother now beginning to be angry said, "Son, I told you that we're desert animals and the wide flat toes enable us to walk on the sandy desert land without sinking in the sand. Thanks, mum.

So we have hunch backs to store water and other essentials for our desert journeys, and a huge eye lids to prevent sand from getting into our eyes on windy times, and wide flat toes from keeping us from sinking in the sandy desert travels, then why the heck are we here in the Bronx Zoo?

Beloved in Christ, we are desert animals and Lent is inviting us to go back to the desert where we belong.

The wilderness or the desert is a place of silence, solitude, and emptiness. The desert was a kind of a university where God trained his people, Moses spent 40 days on the desert on the holy mount Sinai where he encountered God face to face with prayer and fasting.

The Prophet Elijah was also led on a 40 days journey to the holy mount Sinai to seek the face of God. John the Baptist was not spared, he too spent some time in the desert encountering God before he began his public ministry. And from today's Gospel we see Jesus was no exception

to this pattern of desert life. He spent 40 days and nights with fasting and prayer seeking the face and the approval from his Heavenly Father. There he was tested by the devil when he was in a critical moment of hunger and loneliness. Lent, therefore invites you and me, indeed all Christians, into the desert to prepare for the greatest feast of our salvation. Welcome to Lent.

When God put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, he supplied them with everything they needed for abundant life and happiness with him. But when they listened to the voice of evil and followed the counsel of the serpent, who is the devil, they doubted God's word and disobeyed his command. They fell because they trusted in themselves rather than in God.

They were cast out of Paradise and driven into the wilderness in order to regain Paradise for the lost children of God. Jesus refuses food to show his dependance on the bread of heaven, the word of God, that would sustain him not only in his physical hunger, but in his hour of temptation as well. When the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread, Jesus replied with the words of Scripture, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word the proceeds from the mouth of God".

Where did Jesus find the strength to survive the desert harsh conditions and the tempter's seduction? He fed on God's word and found strength in doing his Father's will. Satan will surely tempt us and he will try his best to get us to choose our own will over God's will. And that's exactly what happened to Adam and Eve.

All that the serpent had to do was to sow doubt about whether God had their best interest in mind. Eve considered her options and ate it; Adam just seemed to follow her lead, and the deed was committed. They both made the choice to listen to the word of the serpent against the word of God.

All our achievements, all of our discoveries, all of our wars, all the heights to which we have risen to and the depths to which we have sunk, have been about using or abusing the freedom of choice which God gave us.

If the devil can't make us renounce our faith or sin mortally, he will try to get us to make choices that will lead us, little by little, away from what God

wants for us. And this is part of what we can learn from the temptation of Jesus. The word of God is our strength and our shield as we make our Lenten journey this year.

To wind up, permit me to share with you some fasting suggestions compiled by Pope Francis:

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.  
Fast from sadness and be filled with gratitude.  
Fast from anger and be filled with patience.  
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.  
Fast from worries and have trust in God.  
Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.  
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.  
Fast from bitterness and fill you're hearts with joy.  
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate.  
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.  
Fast from words and be silent and listen.

Have a blessed Lent.