

## Father Samson's Homily for the First Sunday of Lent

We have entered Lent since Ash Wednesday. This Sunday's Gospel of Saint Mark takes us directly from the baptism of Jesus to the content of his message. In response to the expectation of the people of Israel for a Messiah, Jesus announces his coming "The time is fulfilled: The Reign of God is at hand. Convert and believe in the Gospel" » (Mk 1:15)

Convert! Jesus talks about the effort we must do to enter the Kingdom of God. This call through the Gospels is addressed to each of us. Jesus invites us to reorient ourselves to the right path. To "convert" is to change a way of life. Jesus encourages us to dare to change, to clean up our lives, to get back to God.

Today, we are all invited to a real conversion and renewal of life during this period of Lent by fasting, prayer, almsgiving, penance, and reconciliation. In fasting we sacrifice our love of "self" so that we can become free to love God and others. In prayer we sacrifice our love of "time" to make time for the love of God. In almsgiving we sacrifice our love of "stuff" to make room for the love of others. This is the way that we can enter with Jesus into the desert. And what are the challenges in the desert that we might find? These are the hardships of life--like the desert of sickness; the desert of a lack of faith; the desert of concerns for our family; the desert of the needs of our community. But Jesus is with us. He never leaves us alone in our deserts.

The Lenten season calls us to prepare ourselves in the wilderness of prayer and fasting with Jesus. We pray today for all of those who are suffering because they are sick. We pray for those who do not have food, electricity, and other basic needs. During this Lenten season, let us take more time to pray for others and for ourselves in coming frequently to church. We can make time for praying the rosary and the stations of the cross. We can make time for Taizé prayer and communal prayer in our parish. I especially encourage you to come to our Parish Mission on the evenings of March 1st, 2nd and 3rd. Tony, Jose and Lynn Melendez will guide us in song, prayer and reflection to bring life into our desert experiences. This will be a wonderful time to renew our spirit. This will be a wonderful time to receive God's mercy. Please come.

My friends, Lent prepares us for a sincere interior transformation. So, let us get to work even in small steps. Setting ourselves small, concrete, and achievable goals to progress more in our faith. Let us take action. Let us transform! Let us rise from our ashes to rise with Jesus to a new life. The Reign of God is here. Let us take time to intensify our relationship with God in our own desert. Let us take time to discover that in the midst of all that is happening, there is the Light of Jesus Christ who guides us in the right way.

What is my desert, my wilderness today? 'Where am I going? What am I looking for? These are searching questions. Jesus offers us a rereading of our daily life, a real reorientation of heart.

During this time of Lent, Christ invites us to enter a personal relationship with His Father. Let God's energy act in us! This is the Good News that Jesus proclaims through Galilee: "The time is fulfilled; the reign of God is very near: "Convert and believe in the Good News".

Throughout this Lent, we are invited to follow Jesus into the desert. He wants to associate us with his victory. He puts us face to face with our challenges and responsibilities. But he does not leave us on our own. It is with Christ that we can be victorious over the forces of temptation in our lives. We can resist evil with the help of Christ. Let us pray that Christ will be with us in our desert experiences. Amen

*"Convert and believe  
in the Good News"*