

Chaplain's Bulletin February 26, 2023



Dear Folks,

On the first Sunday of Lent, we encounter Jesus in the desert for forty days. This echoes the story of Moses and the Israelites in the desert for forty years before they entered the promise land.

We also remember that after the golden calf incident, Moses was fasting for forty days on Mount Sinai while God was renewing the covenant. Hosea uses the image of an adulterous wife to teach about Israel's relationship with God. Hosea takes her out into the desert to help her remember their love (Hosea 2:16). Elijah had a good meal and then fasted for forty days while walking in the desert (1 Kings 19). He sorted through the noise and heard God's whispering to him. This pulled him out of his despair and renewed his sense of purpose.

During Lent we are to find a bit of desert, clearing out some of the usual stimuli and the usual pursuits to hear the quiet call of God. The world works hard to addict us to its stimuli so that we never have a chance to think, to step back, to question our direction.

In Daniel Goleman's book "Emotional Intelligence" he mentions one of the components of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. This was the first time I realized that self-awareness is something that some people have more of, and some people have less of. I think we humans have a dangerous tendency to presume we are completely self-aware and how can we not be? I suspect a lot of it has to do with being distracted by other things. We are constantly bombarded by messages and stimuli; we have so many tasks nibbling at our ankles, and we are constantly drawn toward our desires. Looking to things outside ourselves, we lose track of what is happening inside.

If we live in a house that regularly has certain odors, we soon stop smelling them. When we go out, we can lose the habituation, and returning we become more aware. Whatever we do this Lent, let us step away from what we usually do, and refresh our perception, so we can go back and see things in a new light.

Fasting and abstaining remind us that we can say no to our desires by God's grace when we choose to. We can easily get in such a deep habit of saying yes, we lose the ability to say no, and this makes us less free (see John 8:31-34). Too much attachment to the things of this world can make us lose our desire for the presence of God.

If we do Lent well, we can come out of it seeing things (including ourselves) more clearly, more free to choose things that really matter over lesser things, renewed in our sense of purpose, more keenly desiring the presence of God, and bolder in serving Him.

Blessings,

Fr. Jim