

The desert is a place without comforts.

It is a place of testing.

It is a place in which we know we do not have the resources we need.

It is a place in which we are compelled to rely utterly on God.

- What do you think has been the most testing time of your life?
- Were there ways in which that time felt like a desert?
- What helped you to get through it?

A Closing Prayer

Father God,
when we go through times of testing,
may we strengthened by your Spirit;
when we go through times of dryness,
may we be refreshed by your Spirit;
when we go through times of emptiness,
may we be filled by your Spirit.
On every step of our way,
may we know your gracious presence with us,
now and always.

Amen.

Lent Reflections

Lenten Landscapes

Week 1: The Desert



- What comes into your mind when you think of a desert?
- Have you ever visited a desert? What was it like?
- Are there other kinds of 'wilderness' you have been to? What is it that draws people to enter places of wilderness?

St Mark's Gospel tells of Jesus beginning his ministry in the wilderness.

Spend some time reading and reflecting on these words

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

(Mark 1.4-5, 9, 12-13)

- Why do you think Jesus was led into the desert at the beginning of his ministry?
- What sort of a place was the desert for Jesus?
- What other Bible stories can you think of that take place in deserts?

The following reflection was written by Martin L. Smith, in a book for Lent called *A Season for the Spirit*. Read it and share any thoughts it prompts in you.

Imagine yourself with me sitting in these ruins. We are looking south down the deepest cleft in the earth and in the distance the Dead Sea is shimmering in the intense heat like a lake of mercury. To the east the river Jordan snakes towards it, and the mountains of Moab from which Moses had seen the promised land tower beyond. To the west rise the massive brown hills of the wilderness, rent by deep gorges. Looking up towards the summit of the nearest mountain, Jebel Quruntul, we see an ancient monastery clinging to the cliffside.

This is the place where we are all invited to stand at the beginning of Lent to take in the meaning of this movement from the river to the desert, and to be caught up in it ourselves. Lent is the season for the Spirit of truth, who drove Jesus into the wilderness to initiate him into the truth which sets free...

...If I am going forward into that truth for which God knows I am ready at this point in my life, I am going to need the Spirit to drive me.