

## GOSPEL

MARK 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

This first Sunday of Lent, the Gospel recalls the themes of temptation, conversion and the Good News. Mark the Evangelist writes: "The Spirit immediately drove Jesus out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan". Jesus goes into the desert to prepare himself for his mission in the world. He does not need conversion, but as a man, he must go through this trial, both for himself, to obey the Father's will, and for us, to give us the grace to overcome temptation. This preparation consists in the battle against the evil spirit, that is, against the devil. For us too, Lent is a time of spiritual "contest", of spiritual struggle: we are called to confront the Evil One through prayer in order to be able, with God's help, to overcome him in our daily life. We know that evil unfortunately is at work in our existence and around us, where there is violence, rejection of the other, closure, war, injustice. All of these are the work of the Evil One, of evil.

Immediately following the temptations in the desert, Jesus begins to preach the Gospel, that is, the Good News, the second word. The first was "temptation", the second, "Good News". And this Good News demands man's conversion — the third word — and faith. He proclaims: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand"; and then he cautions, "repent, and believe in the gospel", that is, believe in this Good News that the kingdom of God is at hand. In our lives, we

always need to convert — every day! —, and the Church invites us to pray for this. In fact, we are never sufficiently orientated towards God and we must continually direct our minds and our hearts towards him. In order to do this, we need to have the courage to reject all that takes us off course, the false values which deceive us, by subtly flattering our ego. Rather, we must entrust ourselves to the Lord, to his goodness and to his project of love for each of us. Lent is a time of repentance, yes, but it is not a time of sorrow! It is a time of penance, but it is not a time of sorrow, of mourning. It is a joyous and serious commitment to strip ourselves of our selfishness, of our "old man", and to renew ourselves according to the grace of our Baptism.

Only God can give us true happiness: it is useless to waste our time seeking it elsewhere, in wealth, in pleasure, in power, in a career.... The Kingdom of God is the realization of all our aspirations because at the same time, it is the salvation of mankind and the glory of God. On this first Sunday of Lent, we are invited to listen carefully and to hear Jesus' appeal to convert, and to believe in the Gospel. We are exhorted to begin the journey towards Easter with commitment, to embrace evermore the grace of God who wishes to transform the world into a kingdom of justice, peace and fraternity.

May Mary Most Holy help us to live this Lenten Season with fidelity to the Word of God and with unceasing prayer, as Jesus did in the desert. It is not impossible! It means living each day with the desire to embrace the love that comes from God and which seeks to transform our life and the entire world.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Jesus was tempted in order that his mission and ministry could be pure and aligned solely on the Fathers' will. Share with the group any examples you have experienced where temptation and 'wilderness' has been a time for gaining focus, clarity and cleansing of desire. How did you experience God's presence?
- Pope Francis says that in order to repent and convert we need to have the courage to reject all that takes us off course, the false values which deceive us, by subtly flattering our ego. How has this been true in your life?
- In what ways have you discovered Jesus' words to be 'good news' in your life?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.