

Desert Life

Intro. Every occupation and sport has its “spring training,” the preparation period before beginning work. It is *not* to be confused with “Spring *Break*.” That’s something else. Think of the Lord’s forty days in the desert as “survival training” for his mission.

I. The first verse of the gospel refers to the Lord returning from his “baptism” at the Jordan River, where the sky opened, the Holy Spirit descended on him and the voice of the Father said he was his beloved son. He was *energized* by the Spirit and the love of the Father. He went to the desert to focus his energy on the inner strength he would need for the next three years. It is not unusual for people today to do similar survival courses and extended retreats. St.

Ignatius developed a rigorous thirty day retreat that is a real challenge. These kinds of exercises have a way of removing distractions and concentrating our minds and bodies on our purpose. If taken seriously, Lent can do something similar for our faith life. While he was alone in the desert, the Lord wrestled with temptations he would face in his ministry: to use his power to destroy his enemies; to be an earthly king; and to test the Father’s love for him. The tempter tried to get the Lord to question his identity as the Son of God. Twice he said, “**If** you are the Son of God...” prove it by turning a rock into bread or leaping off the temple to see if his Father would save him. *We* are often challenged to prove *our* identity as “one of the group” when we are dared to do something, usually something dumb or wrong. Sometimes it’s called an initiation. Remember, the

devil can quote scripture and pretend to have authority to grant our wishes.

Concl. Lent is our annual “spring training” for Easter and beyond. Picture the window sticker, “**Desert Life**” instead of Cove Life or Island Life. For the next five weeks, along with our Catechumens in the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults preparing for Baptism and Candidates for full Communion, we face the challenge of testing ourselves by prayer, fasting and good works. Like any good exercise program, whether on the treadmill, a weekly run or weights or yoga, an increase in time or number of repetitions results in better performance. So too our prayer life. It is fairly easy to put daily reminders on our devices together with web sites and books for scripture study or prayers so that no matter where we are, we can spend a few minutes to add reps to our

prayer life. As one of my scripture sources wrote, the challenges of the gospel could be translated to three of the biggest temptations all human beings face: “love of pleasure, love of possessions and love of glory,” [Luke, *Sacra Pagina*, L.T.Johnson]. Our true identity is not found in any of those. It is found in our following the Lord’s example of obedience to his Father in the face of our own serious temptations. The Lord’s sacrifice was much more than giving up candy or TV or reducing our use of the internet for a few weeks. Maybe this year we could make our Lenten sacrifices **substantial** and possibly **permanent**.

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