

**Fr. John Sassani**  
**Homily Given on March 5, 2006**  
**First Sunday of Lent**  
**Liturgical Year B**

The Gospels give us three versions of Jesus' temptation in the desert. The accounts in Matthew and Luke are very similar. John doesn't mention it at all. Mark's version is different and the shortest. Let me set the scene.

Jesus has come from His Baptism. The Holy Spirit descended. Jesus heard the Father say, 'You are my Son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased.' Then the Spirit who had just descended drove Jesus into the desert for 40 days alone . . . 40 days tested by Satan . . . 40 days near the wild beasts . . . 40 days with divine protection by the angels.

He is alone, but not alone – the Spirit and the angels are with him. He is tested – of what are you made? – ambivalence – not gross temptation to evil or ungodly actions. He is in a hostile environment – not only the wild beasts, but God's enemy, the one who tells us not to trust God. It is a time of decision for Jesus – will He live out His baptismal experience, what was revealed at His baptism, or not? It is an intense experience of what is a constant reality in his life – drawn to the Father and His will and yet there is a lure to do His own thing, to go the other way.

Sound familiar? As the letter to the Hebrews says, He is like us in every way – tested in the way we are –yet never sinned. Jesus comes out of the wilderness clear about the choice for God and His will, and sympathetic to our need for help. He begins to preach: God's world is breaking in – make the choice – believe the good news. People respond from the middle of their ambivalence and self-reliance, drawn to Christ and His Gospel.

There was a family I came to know. They were nice people, but something was off. Eventually I found out that alcoholism was the problem, the husband's alcoholism. Eventually I knew them well enough to ask him one day, 'What would your life be like without alcohol?' There was a long pause. Then he said, 'I'm in control. I can stop whenever I want.' A year and a half later, the man called. 'Would you come with me and my wife when she brings me to the rehab hospital for alcoholism treatment?' it had been a very long sojourn in the desert for him. His life was changed by the Good News – God's new world breaking in – and he could make the choice. He began to believe he couldn't stop but that grace could change him. Jesus became, in a much more vibrant manner, not only the preacher but the source of new life for this man when self-reliance no longer worked for him.

The testing in the desert and the proclamation of Jesus to turn around and believe the good news are a call to us. Don't live in ambivalence. Don't rely totally on yourself. Follow Me. Rely on Me. Join Me in living for God and under God's rule. See how life will change.

Christ is here today, showing us His experience, human experience . . . calling us . . . proclaiming to us that the news is good, the war is over, join me . . . giving us Himself, far better than whatever the angels did for Him, so that we can make the decision for God. How we do with that decision will determine the level of joy we experience at Easter.