

## **Can't Turn Around**

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent (Year B)

Calendar Date

Fr. Tony Davis

Have you ever had the experience of starting something that you were nervous about and reaching the point where there was no turning back? Maybe it was your first time on a big roller coaster, the first day at a new job, or even a wedding day.

I think Jesus probably had a similar feeling as he went out into the desert to be tempted by Satan for 40 days. That is a long time! Those first few days of adjustment had to be the hardest and most nerve-racking. He had little food, nobody to talk to, and lived among the wild beasts. Once he began, he knew that there was no going back. He needed to do this in order to begin his public ministry. In the second half of today's Gospel, after he survives the 40 days, Jesus could finally say, "this is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Throughout the course of our lives, I am sure there are days when we want to go back. We want to back to better days, back to simpler times, back to our childhood, or, for some, even back to the time before we were born, before we were forced into existence.

The author and therapist M. Scott Peck, speaking in religious language, expresses the dilemma that every person faces. He writes, "we really cannot go back to [the Garden of] Eden. We must go forward through the desert. But that journey is hard and consciousness often painful. And so most people stop their journey as quickly as they

can. They find what looks like a safe place, burrow in the sand, and stay there rather than go forward through the painful desert, which is filled with cactuses and thorns and sharp rocks.” (*Further Along the Road Less Traveled*, 19) In other words, ever since Adam and Eve left the garden and lost their innocence, there is no going back to a perfect utopian garden for humanity. The only way out of this life is to move forward through the desert. As Christians, even though we can't see it, we trust that there will be new life on the other side of the desert.

The desert that we talk about in Lent and that Peck mentions is not necessarily a literal place. The cactuses, thorns, and sharp rocks of our deserts are symbolic of our places of scarcity, uncertainty, and temptation. The desert is our inner emptiness, our thirst for nourishment, and our desire for self-knowledge. At some point in our lives, we have to make this journey. If we don't, the journey will be forced upon us when it is almost too late.

*In life, there is no going backward, only forward through the desert.*

Questions: In what ways do I turn away from the desert places in my life? What have I learned from my willingness to go into the desert? Do I ask God for strength to keep moving forward each day?

There is an African American Gospel song that summarizes our journey into the desert and our call to keep moving through it. It says, “we've come this far by faith leaning on the Lord; trusting in His Holy Word, he's never failed me yet. Oh, can't turn around, we've come this far by faith.”