

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan
Homily Given on February 25, 2007
First Sunday of Lent – Liturgical Year C

We're so familiar with today's gospel story that we skip over the details. But today – at Lent's early time-remember that old saying: God is in the details. That's never more true than today.

The first detail. The gospel states clearly that Jesus is "filled with the Holy Spirit". Of course, you say. I knew that. But reflect on it for a moment. Jesus goes into the wilderness filled with the Holy Spirit. At his earlier baptism in the river Jordan, you remember, the Holy Spirit descends on him visibly in the form of a dove. A few weeks ago, the gospel gave us a picture of Jesus preaching to an astonished crowd of his townsmen in Capernaum. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," he reads from Scripture. Remember what he then told them? "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Being "filled with the Holy Spirit" is very important to understand what's going on as Jesus fasts and prays in the wilderness. It's that Spirit who gives Jesus the wisdom and strength to "just say no".

Here's one of our links to this Lenten gospel. What does the gospel have to say to us? It's a wild dramatic story, but is it about me? In fact, it is. On the day of our baptism, you and I were gifted with the Holy Spirit. On the day of our Confirmation, we were sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Listen to the prayer of Eucharist later in the Mass. Hear, especially, the plea that you and I, nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ, may be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Detail two. What words does the devil use in temptation number one? He meets Jesus in the Judean desert. It's a harsh, vast, and desolate place. There in the desert it's easy to picture Jesus famished, weak, and maybe not seeing things straight. His hunger is not just for a Big Mac. Jesus' hunger is soul-wrenching, deep, and total. What's the devil's first word? *If you are the Son of God. If you are filled with God's Spirit.* Jesus is tempted to doubt that God cares, to doubt God gives him the resources necessary to be who God calls him to be.

It's not so different with us. There are times when our lives take us into a wilderness, when we sense our frailty, when God seems far. *If God sees. If God cares. If God matters.* Our wilderness today could easily be the Internet, shopping, TV, or the mall. Those are the wilderness. Sure. They're full of false promises, places that promise what they can't deliver.

One of the reasons why the Church gives us the gospel of Jesus' temptation on the First Sunday of Lent is to encourage us to reflect. Begin this year's reflection with these thoughts.

Like Jesus, I really am "filled with the Holy Spirit". Sure, I haven't always used the Spirit well. Sure, my life is and probably always will be less than a perfect expression of the Holy Spirit's presence. Nonetheless, Lent comes around every year with its astounding statement: You are filled, sealed, gifted with the very Spirit of the living God.

Then, too, life will have its wilderness times. We'll sense emptiness, weakness – you name it. We'll be hungry with a kind of hunger no five-course meal could even touch. We'll ache down deep and wonder about everything.

The good news? This gospel says the devil is the picture of a slimy, devious, and clever tempter. But no matter what, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus wins out.

No one says it's easy. In our case, we've probably already got a track record of slips and slides. But Lent is an invitation. Stop. Think who you are. Think of what God has given you – not least, you are filled with the Holy Spirit. That Spirit didn't leave Jesus alone in the wilderness. The Spirit doesn't leave us when the going gets rough. This Lent, the Holy Spirit goes with us into our deserts, helps us confront hard times, and supports us as we turn again to live closer to God and one another. That's Lenten good news.

Blessed Lent to all.