Finding Our Desert Places

**Welcome to the Lent session of our Small Church Communities!**

As always, we begin this season with Jesus, as he is “sent” into the desert to pray and be near the Father. The desert (with its dry and simple isolation) is a fitting symbol for our hearts. We strive to be away from the noise and confusion of our daily lives, hoping to hear God’s voice more clearly. The desert can be harsh and brutal, but also something so necessary.

And hopefully, like Jesus, we discover that we are not alone in our desert places. God wants to journey with us in our efforts to fast, pray and grow closer to him. Like the angels who came to minister to Jesus, we are always supported, led and guided too. The essay below offers a good explanation of this image.

***Reflection:***

Years ago, while in college, I studied in the Holy Land during the summer. Our group traveled to an expansive desert. We traversed over barren rock while burning in the sun’s heat. At the edge of a cliff, we all noticed something that stopped us in our tracks. Across the hill, a line of greenery flowed down the barren land. A small stream created beautiful, lush shrubbery. Life sprang up with just a small amount of water. Even in the desert, life is possible.

*“The image of the Lenten desert reveals to us that in Christ, all things are possible.”*

Since that summer, I have prayed with this image of the earthly desert, of greenery emerging from nothingness. Sometimes, the barrenness of that desert is nothing compared to my inner life. My heart is often a dry place of brutal turmoil. My inner life is often desolate and lonely. Anger is a treacherous landscape. My prayer is often the ground upon which I ache for change or healing. The physical desert of the Holy Land has become an interior landscape and experience of seeking Jesus’ love, especially on this journey to Easter renewal. I return to this desert in my heart and memory every year in Lent.

In Lent, our inner lives may seem just as treacherous and barren. The image of the Lenten desert reveals to us that in Christ, all things are possible. In this season, we journey to Easter to renew our life in Christ in baptism. In these waters, we are born again, we discover life amid our inner pain and turmoil. The landscape of the heart is given new growth, even when we feel overwhelmed by the immensity of human suffering. In Christ, even our thoughts, reactions, and voices discover new life. This new life is a surprise and delight, an unexpected growth along the contour of our hearts.

No matter the deserts we face in this Lenten journey, **God desires to accompany us**. Our call in Lent is to listen. Our way forward in the uphill climb of desert temptations is to listen even more attentively to Christ in the quiet places of our hearts. Stations of the Cross or the Rosary. However, listening to the ways of Christ in our lives becomes the place of inner freedom in the heat of our desert experiences of loss, grief, and uncertainty. May we not fear Lent’s desert.

* Adapted from an essay by Fr. Ronald Raab

***Related scripture:***

At the time when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens --
while as yet there was no field shrub on earth
and no grass of the field had sprouted,
for the LORD God had sent no rain upon the earth
and there was no man to till the soil,
**but a stream was welling up out of the earth
and was watering all the surface of the ground --**the LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground
and blew into his nostrils the breath of life,
and so man became a living being.
Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east,
and he placed there the man whom he had formed.
Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow
that were delightful to look at and good for food. (Genesis 2: 4b-9)

***Focus Thoughts:***

Each week, the materials end with these thoughts to help us stay focused on our theme:

**What was my “desert place” this week?**

**Was I able to see something new and green springing forth from this?**

***Note:*** *You can share these as a group, or just remind participants to reflect on these thoughts at home.*

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For further prayer and reflection this season, check out the resources from Loyola Press, including:

Eight Ways to Pray During Lent

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/lent/perspectives-on-lent/articles/8-ways-to-pray-during-lent/>

And:

General articles and prayer ideas

<https://www.loyolapress.com/catholic-resources/liturgical-year/lent/>