

Led by the Spirit Into the Wilderness

The “Desert Experience”

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit out into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, after which he was very hungry, and the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to turn into loaves.” But He replied, Scripture says: “Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

The devil then took him to the holy city and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. “If you are the Son of God,” he said, “throw yourself down; for Scripture says: He will put you in his angels’ charge, and they will support you on their hands in case you hurt your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, “Scripture also says: You must not put the Lord your God to the test.”

Next, taking him to a very high mountain, the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “I will give you all these,” he said, “if you fall at my feet and worship me.” Then Jesus replied, “Be off, Satan! For Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.”

Then the devil left him, and angels appeared and looked after him. (Mt 4:1-11, New Jerusalem Bible.)

The Church begins its Liturgical season of Lent with this account of Jesus' temptations. To reflect on this passage, we must first recall Jesus' Baptism in the River Jordan and that magnificent theophany of the Most Holy Trinity. The Spirit descended and anointed Jesus as The Christ, the Messiah, in keeping with the Hebrew tradition of anointing anyone called to a great mission, such as priests, prophets and kings, all of which Jesus is, as attested to by the gifts of the Magi at His birth. The heavens opened and a voice proclaimed, **“This is my Beloved Son in Whom I am well pleased. Hear Him.”** This Jesus whose divinity St. Joseph had hidden from public view-- like a cloud hides the sun-- for nearly thirty years in the obscurity of Nazareth is called forth from the tomb of that hidden life to this public manifestation of His divinity and God's favor that must have amazed all who were present. Jesus is truly the Holy One of God and His mission will be a spiritual one of victory over Satan, sin and death. Almost immediately after this proclamation of Jesus' divine Sonship, He is **led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan.**

There are no accidents with God and everything God does has a purpose. Jesus is led by the Spirit so we know it is God's will that Jesus be subjected to the temptations

of Satan, and it is for God's purpose as becomes evident. Jesus is filled with the Spirit through His anointing and His answers to Satan's temptations are testimony that the One within is always stronger than the one without. Jesus overcomes each temptation with the Word of God. Satan can offer nothing truly spiritual nor anything lasting nor anything of ultimate good for all his offers are only apparent good and are temporal, which means they self destruct, given enough time; they cannot satisfy the spiritual hunger for God placed in the heart of the creature by the Creator. Jesus confirms His divine Sonship in foreshadowing His victory over Satan in the way in which He dismisses the lies of the evil one. The Son of Man reveals His superiority to and authority over Satan as the final battle with the devil is about to begin and Satan's "**wilderness of darkness**" that is the "**unredeemed world**" is soon to be overcome and diffused with the Light of Christ and the reign of the Holy Spirit. The proud and disobedient one will be overcome by the humble and obedient Son. Since this Son of Man is also God, he cannot be tempted by the devil, for God is omniscient and knows what is in the mind of Satan before he does and thus Jesus outwits Satan in every answer with the simple Truth, for He is Truth, He is the Word of God. God is not flesh and is not subject to its weakness. God is Creator and therefore all the world and every person in it is His; there is nothing Satan can offer Him that He does not already possess. God is the one true God and the only One to whom worship is owed; God cannot worship anyone.

Surely Satan must have surmised that the ancient promise made in the Garden of Paradise when Adam and Eve sinned and were banned from it, was being realized in his encounter with Jesus in the wilderness. Surely he must have begun to understand that this is the Son born of a Woman-- a Virgin Isaiah said-- whose heel would crush his ugly head. It is that same Immaculate Virgin who renewed that promise when she appeared to Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil as "**Our Lady of America®**" and gave us the message of the Divine Indwelling Presence of the Most Holy Trinity as the ultimate defeat of Satan!

From the beginning of time every prophecy, every vision, throughout the centuries, will have its fulfillment in "Our Lady of America®" and her message of the Indwelling Trinity living in every soul, which will renew the whole world and destroy Lucifer and all the evil spirits in the fight he is making against the Indwelling Trinity. This will eventually destroy him. (Words to visionary of the message of "Our Lady of America®, Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, recorded August 30, 1995.)

Though Jesus is God and cannot be tempted, he endured the humiliation of subjecting himself to Satan's foolery in His Sacred Humanity **for our sake**, to show His identity with our humanity and to show us we, too, have power over Satan and should immediately dismiss his lies with the Truth, with the Word of God. "Begone Satan!" We must never dialogue with Satan whose angelic intelligence is so superior to our inferior

human reason further darkened by sin. Satan plays upon human weakness and can quote Scripture to his own purpose, so any discussion with him can lead to twisted truth, confusion, doubt, compromise, rationalization, division, a weakening of spiritual resolve, and a diversion from the focus on objective Truth and God, above all else. Satan sought to play upon Jesus' Humanity to weaken His spiritual resolve to do the Will of the Father in fulfilling His spiritual and redemptive mission on earth. Jesus was born to die for us!

Although people find new ways to interpret these three temptations, they always speak to the three sources of all temptation as defined by the Church: the world, the flesh and the devil, and which the Church also teaches are overcome by three spiritual weapons against Satan's illusions: prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Satan is the antithesis of Christ. The greater the work of God, the greater Satan's attack upon it to destroy it. Since Our Lady herself declared the Indwelling Trinity will bring Satan's demise, we should not be surprised at his vicious current attack upon the devotion of "**Our Lady of America®**" to the Indwelling Trinity. God always wins in the end! In dealing with inner promptings, we must always discern the spirits and determine whose voice it is that beckons us: God's, Satan's, or our own. Again, "**Our Lady of America®**" confirms her victory over Satan in these words to Sister Mildred in 1980.

But in the end all will come as I desire. Those who oppose you will receive light to understand. These good people mean well and if they are in authority it is for you to listen respectfully and obey. I will speak to them in their hearts and the Divine Spirit who makes all things clear will give them wisdom and understanding. In the end they will do as I wish. So, have patience, dear one, it will happen as I have said and those who have opposed me will become my most ardent and courageous supporters. Until this comes to pass, wait in trust, knowing that I never fail those who place their confidence in me. My Son blesses you, be at peace. (Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil, Diary, "*Our Lady of America©*," pg. 37.)

Jesus wasn't led into the wilderness only to confront Satan or to show us how to deal with temptations. He was led there by the Spirit so His Humanity might radically encounter His divinity, His divine Father. Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, had completed his role as "shadow of the heavenly Father," veiling Jesus' divinity in the obscurity of Nazareth. Now Joseph disappears from the scene so there is no doubt henceforth that God is Jesus' Father on earth as He is in heaven. **In the spiritual life there is always an "anointing" or "favor" and a "desert experience" before any mission from God in order to prepare the chosen one for that mission and all it will entail.** We can only imagine what insights into His redemptive mission were given to Jesus in the wilderness where He was separated from all else in order to commune solely with His Father. Was He shown in His Sacred Humanity the horror of what lay ahead? Can we imagine what love must have burned in that Sacred Heart as it laid itself down in the

bosom of the Father's Will, and what Love must have passed from Father to Son in the Spirit that made of Jesus' Heart that flaming furnace of Divine Love into which we must all go if we are to enter into eternal glory? **The spiritual journey is always one of faith and deliverance from darkness and slavery through the refining fires of God's Spirit that take us into the light and freedom of a covenant and a promise.** Was Jesus mirroring for us our individual journey and the journey of His Church, from slavery to freedom through the purifying wind and fire of the desert as seen in the wanderings of the Chosen People as they left Egypt?

Surely Jesus must have seen His own life like the grain of wheat that would be crushed into the ground and broken open so new life might rise from it to become the Bread of Life for all to eat and live. Perhaps a part of Him experienced a foretaste of His agony as He understood in His Humanity what Love would ask of Him for our sake. Surely **His Passion** was seen in the light of **the Father's greater compassion for all mankind** that was guaranteed in the **obedient love** of the Sacred Humanity to the Will of God. Too great for words must have been the communion of Life poured out between these three Persons in one God that would be spilled out on the world in the Blood of this Innocent Unblemished Lamb of God laid on the altar of sacrifice to atone for our sins. Nothing else mattered. "Obedience is better than sacrifice." (1 Sam: 22.) **Obedience is the sacrifice that demands our life in oblation.**

... if God puts you in a place of deprivation for some spiritual purpose you do not try to change it solely for the purpose of satisfying your physical needs. The first thing that the person must do is try to discover what God is doing through the deprivation, what spiritual growth is desired and how it should be achieved. This would show that one does not live by bread alone, but by everything that God says and does. ...Satan had hit the nail right on the head--Jesus is the Son of God. But the essence of Sonship is obedience to the will of the Father. He would not, therefore, act independently of the will of the Father. Jesus knew that the Spirit had led Him into a place that necessitated hunger, and so He would fulfill that task.

<http://bible.org/seriespage/temptation-jesus-matthew-41-11>

Sacred Scripture often uses the term "**wilderness**" and "**desert**" with much the same meaning. Like so many symbols, these words convey paradox or seeming contradictions. The desert is a place that conjures up images of death, but it is also the place where God leads His own to bring them to Life. It is a place where one is stripped of all that is non-essential in order to discover what alone is truly essential, where, "**when there is nothing left but God you know that God is all you need.**" It is a place of desolation, loneliness and the inevitable confrontation with self-- seeing oneself as God sees one-- beyond the lies we live, for there is no place to hide from stark reality and ultimate truth. The desert has a way of scorching away layers of hypocrisy in order

to bare the inmost self, so poor and sinful, so totally dependent upon Someone bigger than oneself to reveal one's true meaning and destiny. **The “desert” is where Grace comes to lick our wounds clean and dry them in the burning sun of Divine Mercy.** It is where we come to know that God loves us in all our wretchedness and desperation and emptiness and seeks only to fill our emptiness with Himself. It is where we come to know God is the only One who can save us: He is our only hope. All else is rubbish. It is the place where we must choose God with all our strength or die in the futility that is ours without God.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without Me you can do nothing. (Jn 15:5.)

In the “desert experience” the Scripture story of salvation becomes our own. The temptation of Jesus is the reverse of the temptation of Adam and Eve who believed the lies of Satan and disobeyed God, eating the forbidden fruit which lost for them, and their posterity, the Garden of Paradise. They were exiled into the world of the knowledge of good and evil, that wilderness of suffering, darkness, hatred, desolation, war and death and alienation from God. Since God wanted us to be capable of love, He made us moral and free to choose, which means making a choice, being put to the test. Where the first Adam failed the test, the New Adam, Jesus, dispels the lies of Satan with Truth and the Word of God, for He is Truth. But Adam and Eve were not banned from Paradise without the promise of a Messiah who would conquer Satan, sin and death. It is Jesus, the God-Man who is sent to save us from this desert that is “**the unredeemed world**” and to restore us to a Paradise greater than the first, to a communion that would entail, not merely walking with God, but an Indwelling Presence of God within our very flesh and on our altars and in our tabernacles. Jesus is that Messiah who makes all things new and opens the gates of heaven with an invitation for all to enter. He is the fire that consumes but does not destroy, the well that never runs dry, the Manna from Heaven that feeds us eternal life. O felix culpa! O happy fault to have brought us so great a Redeemer Who calls the prodigal home to the Father’s house.

Like Abraham, we are all called to leave behind everything we thought was ours or was so important in order to step out in **faith and in obedience to God’s Will** as it takes us to a strange but promised land. Like Jacob we must wrestle with our God through the night, confronting our sins and the lies we live, until, overcome by Him, we finally surrender. “Who is like unto our God?”, for He leaves us wounded as He did Jacob so we might always be conscious of our weakness and our need for Him, and might always be open to His grace and healing power.

Like Moses, awakened to the truth of his own identity which banned him from Egypt’s favor and exiled him into the desert to die or be saved by his God, we find ourselves so often in that same place between death and life, where only God can save

us, from others and from ourselves. The desert is a place where we are **freed from** something in order to be **free for** something else. It is a place of intense purification and surrender to a power that is supreme over all, one we cannot see but know is there. **We are like the worthless straw which, once mixed with the sand of time and the living water of grace, becomes the bricks of enduring things.** How well Cecil B. DeMille describes this “**desert experience**” in his religious epic, **The Ten Commandments**, as Moses is sent into the desert to wander and die or find his God.

All about is desolation. He can neither bless nor curse the power that moves him and he does not know from whence it comes, learning that it can be more terrible to live than to die. He is driven onward through the burning crucible of desert where holy men and prophets are cleansed and purified for God's great purpose.....at last, at the end of human strength, beaten into the dust from which he came, the metal is ready for the Maker's hand.

God's people, like Moses, were led by the Spirit from Egypt into the desert to wander for forty years as God purified them from all the pagan influence of their 400 years of slavery in a land of idolatry and taught them to obey Him and depend totally on Him as their God. In stripping them of all else, they would be free to hear His Heart speak to their hearts so He might establish His covenant with them. “**I will be your God and you will be my people.” “I will espouse you to me forever.”** Then they would know the “**promised land**” even before they reached it. His Divine Heart would be their home. His Law their rule. His Manna their food. His staff would work miracles for them and from the rock a river of water would flow. Yes, He would be their God and they would be His people if they would keep His commandments and obey Him.

The desert! Is it life for us, or is it death? In the New Testament we see John the Baptist for whom the desert was life, escape from the deadly sword of Herod and survival by surrendering to nature and to the Lord of Nature, the God who whispers in the winds and blows where He wills. The Baptist was a man with a mission, a mission bold and relentless, as rugged in its cry for a “**reform of life**” as was his appearance and his lifestyle. He called sin exactly what it is, sin! No compromises and no gray areas. He was willing to stake his life on the Word that had come to him in the desert, and he was killed for it. “**Repent and be saved!**” he cried out as he begged people to rend their hearts so they might be open to receive the Savior who was now in their midst! He minced no words against the hypocrisy of those who say one thing but do another. “**Produce good fruit,**” he demanded!

But after Jesus, what greater prophetic voice is there than the New Eve who was always at the New Adam's side? **The home Mary shared with Jesus and Joseph was the essence of the “desert experience” for it was a place of simplicity and poverty of spirit, a place of humility, surrender, obedient faith and deep communion with**

the living God. It was a cloister, an enclosed garden, paradise on earth, a foretaste of heaven! **Mary's was a life lived between "fiat" and "magnificat," for God always magnifies the lowly who do His Will.** As St. Michael, the Angel Captain of the Lord of Hosts, declared:

Behold, the Queen of angels and of men comes beforehand to make all things ready for her King Son. (Diary, pg. 17)

Is it any wonder then that into this world described as a “**culture of death**” and lost faith and perverted love that God sends His own Mother to call us out of the barren wilderness we have made of our earth and our lives? Is it any wonder that God’s Mother should come to us with a message that demands a “**reform of life**,” a message that is the call of the Spirit to come into the desert and encounter the living God whose Truth will expose the lies of Satan we have allowed into our hearts and minds, the false teachings and false messiahs we have embraced, the impurities and perversions of love’s idolatries and adulteries we endorse as rights, the pride and ambition and abuse of position and money we so often use to lord it over the poor and the lowly?

Reform of life is what I ask as the sign and proof of my children's love for me. God looks at the heart, and if it resembles the heart of His Divine Son, it is with the greatest pleasure he regards it. (Diary, pg. 16)

Like the Baptist, Our Lady pleads with us to live what we say we believe, to strip ourselves of all that holds us back from the experience of God; to surrender to God’s purifying and consuming fire that frees us **from** sin and **for** His Divine Presence.

What am I to do, child of my heart, when my children turn from me? The false peace of this world lures them and in the end will destroy them. They think they have done enough in consecrating themselves to my Immaculate Heart. It is not enough. That which I ask for and is most important many have not given me. What I ask, have asked, and will continue to ask is reformation of life. There must be sanctification from within. I will work my miracles of grace only in those who ask for them and empty their souls of the love and attachment to sin that is displeasing to my Son. Souls who cling to sin cannot have their hands free to receive the treasures of grace that I hold out to them. (Diary, pgs. 18-19.)

Our Lady’s maternal, prophetic and corrective voice has been resounding around the world for over the last hundred years, but still we do not listen. In 1956 Our Lady came to America with her favor and gratitude for our devotion to her under the title of her singular privilege of the Immaculate Conception by which we honor her as our Patroness. Our Lady appeared to Sister Mildred Mary Neuzil as “**Our Lady of America®**” **to thank us and to give us heaven's mandate, an urgent mission**, to lead the world in a spiritual renewal, a “**reform of life**” never before so urgent and so

necessary in order to hold back the arm of God's justice upon a sinful generation. Our Lady calls us out of the wilderness of our "culture of death" into a "civilization of love," that restored Paradise of life and purity and grace, that sacred place of communion with the Indwelling God that is the sanctuary of our own hearts. **She calls us from the "desert of death" into a "desert of life," that sacred space apart where God woos us with His unfathomable Love.** The entire message of "Our Lady of America®" is a call to "reform of life," repentance, conversion, and holiness of life, sanctification from within. The three steps of the spiritual journey are so simple and clear in Mary's call: purification from sin, illumination with Divine Wisdom, and Union with God in the sanctifying grace of the Divine Indwelling of the Most Holy Trinity. The entire message is about establishing the reign of Christ in every heart and every home by doing the Will of God as Jesus, Mary and Joseph did so humbly in their home in Nazareth.

The apparition of "Our Lady of America®" is America's favor and anointing for this urgent mission Heaven has given to America -- to lead the whole world back to Faith and Purity and to sanctification from within through the Indwelling Trinity, the central mystery of our Faith. How can we lead if we ourselves are not purified, illumined and sanctified?

My beloved daughter, what I am about to tell you concerns in a particular way my children in America. Unless they do penance by mortification and self-denial and thus reform their lives, God will visit them with punishments hitherto unknown to them.

My child, there will be peace, as has been promised, but not until my children are purified and cleansed from defilement, and clothed thus with the white garment of grace, are made ready to receive this peace, so long promised and so long held back because of the sins of men.

My dear children, either you will do as I desire and reform your lives, or God Himself will need to cleanse you in the fires of untold punishment. You must be prepared to receive His great gift of peace. If you will not prepare yourselves, God will Himself be forced to do so in His justice and mercy. (Diary, pg. 21.)

The hour grows late. My Son's patience will not last forever. Help me hold back His anger, which is about to descend on sinful and ungrateful men. Suffering and anguish, such as never before experienced, is about to overtake mankind. It is the darkest hour. But if men will come to me, my Immaculate Heart will make it bright again with the mercy which my Son will rain down through my hands. Help me save those who will not save themselves. Help me bring once again the sunshine of God's peace upon the world. (Diary, pg. 15)

O my sweet child, when will my desires be realized? My Immaculate Heart desires with great desire to see the kingdom of Jesus my Son established in all hearts. How I have pleaded with my children to open their hearts to Him, but most are cold and indifferent. Has ever a mother shown more love and interest in her children's welfare than I have done? O my little one, daughter of my Pure Heart, you must pray with greater fervor and offer yourself with greater love to the Heart of my Son. (Diary, pg. 17)

O my sweet child, time passes and with it wasted graces and constant refusals on the part of man to co-operate with me in the accomplishment of the Divine Will for his own sanctification and salvation. (Diary, pgs. 16-17)

Come to me, my children, come to me and learn. There is much I would teach you. It is for your own happiness and eternal salvation. Do not disregard the voice of your Mother. It is the voice of love trying to save you from eternal ruin. (Diary, pg. 16.)

Mary quite literally prepared herself and mankind for the ***first coming*** of Jesus into human history. Only we can prepare for that ***personal coming*** of Jesus into our hearts. Together with Mary we must all help prepare the whole world for Jesus' ***second and final coming*** upon the clouds in His glory to rule over us forever as the Prince of Peace. Lent is a time to circumcise our hearts and purify them with the Word and Will of God. **His will must be dearer to us than all else, for holiness is doing the Will of God.** Mary, our Mother, has given us a pledge of her intercession to guide our path into the way of holiness, into the Heart of Jesus at the center of the Indwelling Triune God. She is our Mother of Mercy who covers so much of our failure with her own purity and favor before God. Let us go to her with confidence for our salvation and that of all the world. She is the New Eve, mother of all the living in the order of grace, Co-Redemptrix with Jesus in God's plan of salvation. Like she did, we must embrace that "**desert experience,**" that "**contemplative solitude**" that makes of our hearts an **enclosed garden where God delights to dwell**, for He has made a covenant with each one of us in our baptism and **He will espouse each of us to Himself forever**, if we allow Him to and so choose. Let us go into that purifying desert to be made ready for this mission heaven has called us to, and which Mary promises to see us through.

My child, I entrust you with this message that you must make known to my children in America. I wish it to be the country dedicated to my purity. The wonders I will work will be the wonders of the soul. They must have faith and believe firmly in my love for them. I desire that they be the children of my Pure Heart. I desire, through my children in America, to further the cause of faith and purity among peoples and nations. Let them come to me with confidence and simplicity, and I,

their Mother, will teach them to become pure like to my heart that their own hearts may be more pleasing to the heart of my Son.

America, the United States in particular, is being given the tremendous, yet privileged, opportunity to lead all nations in a spiritual renewal never before so necessary, so important, so vital. (Diary, pgs. 11, 25.)

I am the Mother of Mercy. Under my mantle I will hide my children. The justice of God will not reach them if they seek refuge beneath the protection of my mercy. My Son gives to me all those souls who come to me with confidence, calling upon my aid. Their salvation is in my hands. I will obtain for them the necessary graces to save their souls.

Come to me, poor, suffering and frightened ones. I am your Mother. Never will I forsake you. Only come to me with a wholehearted and loving trust. Place your souls into my keeping. I am that faithful Mother who never forsakes her children. Honor me by your confidence and love. This I desire and ask of you, my poor children. Do not deny the wishes of your Mother.

(Letter of Sister Mildred Mary Ephrem Neuzil, May 5, 1957.)

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See also

<http://www.ourladyofamerica.com/whatsnew/TheBaptismofJesus.pdf>