

Jesus in the Desert

Grace: Ask for the grace to better know and understand Jesus so that your love for Jesus will grow and your desire to imitate him will increase.

Introduction:

Jesus has just been baptized and likely excited about beginning his public ministry. Yet before Jesus gets to work there are some temptations that he must face so Jesus spends some time in the desert.

Reflect upon the following questions: “What is to be found in the wilderness or the desert? How do you feel watching your friend Jesus walk into the desert? What is Jesus’ mood like when he leaves the Jordan River? If you knew that Jesus was going away for a while, what thoughts or concerns come to mind? What do you say to Jesus? What is on your mind?”

Do you go with Jesus? Are you worried or concerned for Jesus? How does Jesus respond to your concerns? When Satan comes to tempt Jesus, what are your feelings as you watch Satan tempt Jesus? How do you respond when you see a friend in a dangerous situation?

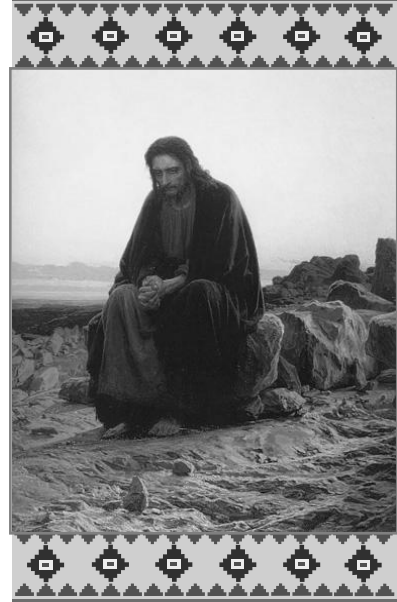
Do you warn Jesus? Do you give Jesus any advice? How do you feel as you watch Jesus respond to Satan? What is Jesus’ attitude as he responds to Satan? Is Jesus angry, tired, impatient, and/or annoyed? As the days pass on, do you notice any changes in Jesus?

Ignatius envisioned and asks you to reflect on the reality that there are good and evil forces at work in your life. Satan will attempt to deceive you. Jesus proves where His allegiance lies as he refuses to be tempted by riches, honor, and pride. Instead, Jesus chooses poverty, insults, and humility. In this battle between good and evil in your heart, where is your allegiance? Are you committed to following Jesus’ example?

Applying some of what you watch Jesus go through in the desert to your own life, what, in your own experience, distracts you from doing God’s will? In your prayer, ask God to help you see these distractions and to help you to answer in ways similar to the ways Jesus did in the story. Are there times when you have been tempted and overcame that temptation? Talk to Jesus about your success. How does Jesus respond to your success? Does Jesus pat you on the back, laugh, or say something to you?

The story ends with an indication that the devil will return at an “opportune time.” Consider when such an opportune might present itself for Jesus? Apply this to yourself, when might the devil return to tempt you? Will you be prepared and committed to fight against those temptations? Are you willing to endure conflict, criticism, and ridicule as you embrace a counter-cultural view of the world? Dare you rely on God’s love, your relationship with Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to sustain you?

Talk to Mary about your desire to follow Jesus’ example. Talk to Jesus about your desire to follow him and what makes it difficult or challenging to do so. Talk to God, the Father, about your desire to follow Jesus regardless of the cost. Ignatius encourages you to have a conversation with Mary, Jesus, and God about important issues. In Ignatian terms, this is called the Triple Colloquy. Pay attention to what each one has to say to you and how they respond to you. You may continue to use the Triple Colloquy in the remaining reflections.



Luke 4: 1-13 --Jesus in the Desert

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Worship the Lord your God and serve him only.'" The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down from here. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you to guard you carefully; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered, "It says: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time.



Christ is being challenged to establish his credibility...we are dealing here with the vast question as to how we can and cannot know God, how we are related to God and how we can lose him. The arrogance that would make God an object and impose our laboratory conditions upon him is incapable of finding him. For arrogance already implies that we deny God as God by placing ourselves above him, by discarding the whole dimension of love, of interior listening: by no longer acknowledging as real anything but what we can experimentally test and grasp. --Joseph Ratzinger

Matthew 4:1-11 --Jesus in the Desert

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'" Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

In these or similar words ... Today Jesus told me that He would go to the desert and contemplate there for many days. I wondered why He wanted to go to the desert and I realized that it is a good place for thinking because you can be alone and there are almost no distractions. When Jesus leaves the Jordan River, He is in a great mood. When He told me that He was going to the desert for a while, my first thought was fearing for His safety. When He saw the look on my face He asked me what was wrong. I told Him that I didn't want Him to go alone. Jesus then told me that He had to because it was His journey and He needed time to Himself. I kept on insisting that I accompany Him, so He finally gave in and let me come along under the condition that we do not speak during the trip. When we were walking into the desert Jesus had a very determined look on his face. I knew this would change during the course of our journey because He told me that He would not eat anything. Forty days passed and I was beginning to wonder how much longer we would stay. Jesus told me that I could return home any time I wanted, but I did not want to abandon my friend. Suddenly, Jesus picked up a stone and in an authoritative voice He said, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone.'" I did not see Him talking to anybody and it baffled me that He said this because it seemed like He thought the stone was bread. Jesus did this two more times and I thought the hunger had gotten to Him and He went mad. Jesus then told me that we were returning home. He explained to me that He was speaking with Satan. The things He had said now made sense. He told me that Satan would return to Him in the future and I should be cautious too. I thought about this and I came to the conclusion that an opportune time for the devil to tempt me is during a time of despair or hardship. The devil's temptation will be to give me the easy way out. I talked to Jesus about His encounter with Satan and He told me that speaking with him was hard because He did not want to appear weak although He was from forty days of fasting. When I told Jesus about overcoming my temptations I told Him that I felt they were very small compared to His. He laughed a little and told me that overcoming any temptation is a big deal and that I did a good job by following His example.

O Lord, grant us faith.
 the faith that removes the mask from the world
 and manifests God in all things;

the faith that enables everything
 to be seen in another light:

that shows us the greatness of God
 and lets us see our own littleness;

that shows us Christ
 where our eyes see only a poor person;

that shows us the Savior
 where we feel only pain.

O Lord, grant us the faith
 that inspires us to undertake
 everything that God wants
 without hesitation,
 without shame,
 without fear,
 and without ever retreating;

the faith that fears neither danger,
 nor sorrow, nor death;

the faith that knows
 how to go through life
 with calm, peace, and profound joy,

and that makes the soul completely indifferent
 to everything that is not you.

---Charles Foucauld

Practicing What Your Preach ... To better understand and appreciate Jesus' time in the desert, consider fasting for a day by only eating a single meal throughout the day. You may also want to spend some time away from distractions by going for a walk on your own, not watching TV or listening to music for a day. Try to give yourself an experience of prolonged silence. Pay attention to the feelings that withdrawing from food and other distractions produce in you.

