

First Sunday of Lent
March 9, 2025
Year of the Holy Spirit

“It is fitting that it be recorded that the first Adam was cast out of Paradise into the desert, that you may observe how the second Adam returned from the desert to Paradise. . . .”
(Saint Ambrose, Exposition of the Gospel of Luke)

While writing his *Commentary on Luke*, Saint Cyril of Alexandria attempted to provide his readers an answer as to why Jesus was **led by the Spirit** into the desert to be tempted by Satan. I call this to your attention because there are some modern ministers who still grapple with the idea that God or, in this instance, the Holy Spirit would lead a person into a situation where they will undergo temptation. The answer, he contended, centered upon a prayerful examination of the word desert. Is the desert a place, a state in the spiritual life, or both?

Throughout the Gospels, we will read instances where Jesus would go off by Himself to a deserted place to pray. (Mark 1:35, 1:45, 3:13, Luke 5:15-16, 6:12-13 to name a few). Although Sacred Scripture does not explicitly state His being led by the Spirit in these instances, we can safely assume He was. We base this response on the work of the Holy Spirit. As we have stated prior, the work of the Holy Spirit is to create within us a perfect image of Jesus. We would seek to offer praise to God in the same way as Jesus. Therefore, the desert place needs to be a physical place where Jesus, and ourselves, can retreat to for quiet time with God.

Likewise, the desert must also be a state in one’s spiritual relationship with God. It must be a state of prayer where, like Jesus, the soul abandons all things which could give comfort or pleasure. It may seem contrary to what we have so often heard, but the growth and depth of our relationship with God **MUST** make us uncomfortable. We must become comfortable with being uncomfortable. I realize this seems contradictory, but the role of the Holy Spirit is to “prune the vine” thus purifying the soul.

I once heard a story told by Venerable Fulton J. Sheen which, I believe, may offer further insight into our understanding of being **led by the Spirit**. A child is sent home from school complaining of a toothache. The child’s parent makes an appointment with a dentist. The parent accompanies the child into the dentist’s office and watches as the dentist examines the tooth. The parent looks on as their child squirms and grimaces in pain. Archbishop Sheen asked the question: “Does the parent tell the dentist to stop because the examination is hurting their child?” No, they would not because they realize this pain is temporary and must occur for their child to be healed. In much the same way, the Holy Spirit **MUST** act as this loving parent. Jesus chooses to undergo His temptations in the desert, to give us an example of what we should do and convey to us the importance of this moment in His life. Jesus defeats the temptations of Satan for all of us. We must, likewise, be led into the desert to face Satan and his temptations if we want to truly be like Jesus in all things. And, we can take consolation knowing our Jesus, the Holy Spirit, our guardian angel along with all angels and saints in Heaven, will not leave us orphaned during that time. They will be there. They have always been there.