

“...we urge the entire community during these days of Lent to keep its manner of life most pure and to wash away in this holy season the negligences of other times. Chapter 49 of the Holy Rule reminds us of our call to holiness - a holiness that already exists within us. This holiness, this gift, was given to us on the day of our Baptism in Christ Jesus. Recently, several of our readings for *Divine Office*, as well as for Mass, gave the instruction, “...be holy as I am holy.” This is a reminder of our *communion* with Christ Jesus. God so loved us that He sent His Son to take on human form..... to take on all aspects of humanity, except that of sin, and to show us how to build the kingdom of God by our response to His invitation, “Do this in memory of me.”

In taking on human form, Jesus had to encounter desert times when he was lost in the wilderness trying to understand, to claim, to own His identity as the Son of God, and the role He was to play in the salvation of all humankind.

The Gospel reading for the first Sunday of Lent tells of the temptations Jesus encountered while in the desert. These temptations are not unlike our own. Jesus turned away from the temptation of personal comfort and self-indulgence when instructed to turn stone into bread. Jesus turned away from the temptation of power and prestige when he was encouraged to throw himself off the parapet of the temple and demand God’s angels to carry Him to safety. Jesus turned away from the temptation of wealth when taken to the high mountain and told that all of the kingdoms of the world would be his.

During that time in the desert Jesus was coming into his own person as the Son of God. He was tapping into the core of who He was and the gifts that were already within Him. Jesus used the silence found in the desert to overcome the temptations that surrounded him, and pulled on the inner strength that God supplied. Empowered by this self-knowledge he was then prepared to begin His mission of bringing salvation to all.

The story of Jesus’ journey of our salvation is shared with us in the Gospel. This morning when we received ashes, we were given the instruction, “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel. “ The Gospel readings during Lent demonstrate how Jesus showed love for God and for humankind by his examples of prayer and good works. We are reminded in the Gospel of John Chapter 14 v.12 “..whoever

believes in me will also do the works that I do..." Our call to holiness this Lent is to follow the example of Jesus' life of self-reflection, prayer and good works.

It is through our self-reflection that we become aware of the various gifts given to us by God for the purpose of building up the body of Christ. In becoming more aware of *our* gifts, we recognize the diversity and uniqueness of *each* person's gifts. God gives each of us what we need, and *all* gifts must be utilized (in love and for the good) of the rest of the body.

Are we using our God-given gifts to the best of our ability or are we avoiding them? Are we settling for comfort instead of stretching ourselves in service to others? How well are we each using our God-given gifts in building up the body of Christ?

Each time we celebrate a Eucharistic liturgy, we remember not only the *Passion, Death, and Resurrection* of Jesus but we remember also the *person* of Jesus—the one who loved the poor and outcast, offered forgiveness and mercy; who sacrificed his personal comfort in service to others; who showed compassion, gentleness and humility; who upheld justice; and who knew the importance of prayer.

Each time we celebrate a Eucharistic liturgy and receive the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, we recall St. Augustine's words, "...become what you receive." It is through our reception of the Body and Blood of Christ that we are strengthened in our journey to holiness as we strive to become more like Jesus. Jesus tells us, "Whoever believes in me will also do the works I do."

How do I show love to the poor and outcast? How do I offer forgiveness and mercy? When do I sacrifice personal comfort in service to others? How compassionate, gentle, and humble am I? How do I uphold justice? How do I ensure that prayer is central in my life?

During this Lenten season, may our journey to holiness be guided by our response to Jesus' invitation "Do this in memory of me."