

SUNDAY PLUS

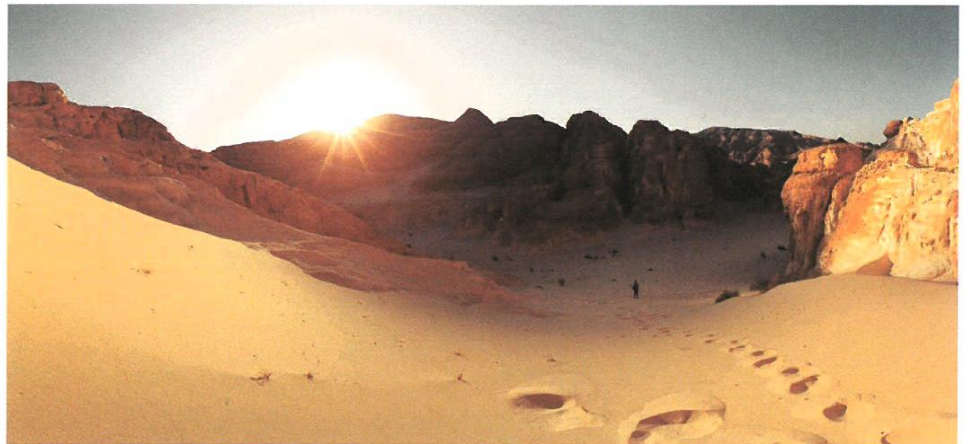
Into the wilderness

Good news!

By Paul Higginson

Before Jesus starts his public ministry, he goes into the desert to fast and pray for forty days. In fact, Mark tells us that “the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness”, suggesting that, like us, Jesus was reluctant to go, reluctant to confront the demons with which we all must grapple.

We too are being called into the wilderness. It is almost as if the Father is saying “there can be no resurrection, no new life, without a period of trial, temptation and emptiness”. This Lent, do



we need our own “desert experience” to get rid of addictions to such things as money, status and ego? To follow Christ is to see things in a new light, to see our daily temptations as false idols – not gateways to happiness but chains that enslave us. Jesus shows us how it’s done in the wilderness. He rejects the temptations as a man, using his human will rather than any divine powers, showing us an example which we can follow. He chooses the narrow path, the way that leads to real freedom, and a peace that the world

(with all its riches and kingdoms) can never give. Jesus goes into the wilderness to prepare for his ministry – when he comes out, Mark tells us he was ready to proclaim the Good News from God.

Lent is our time to free ourselves from everything that holds us back from following Christ and, by so doing, discover how we can become the Good News for others.

Paul Higginson is a retired teacher and author of Doing Christianity: How religion is about what you do, not what you believe.

The world tells us to seek success, power and money; God tells us to seek humility, service and love.

Pope Francis

Abandoned to the wilderness?

By Sr Janet Fearns FMDM

Working in central London, my route often led through a subway beneath a busy road near Victoria Station. I was a bit scared because I had to pass a young man who had made the tunnel his living space. Knowing nothing of his history, my daily greeting was more for my own protection than a recognition of someone who was homeless and appeared unsupported. He never spoke and only nodded his head in response.

Then came the morning when he was standing beside his

sleeping bag. Normally, he sat on the ground and I don’t think I had ever seen him stand. He spoke. “Do you know that you are the only person who smiles at me and says something? Thank you.” I never saw him again.

I still feel sad that my greeting had been given from self-interest, not from welcome and concern.

How many people do we leave in a lonely wilderness because we only see our own needs?

Sr Janet Fearns is a Franciscan Missionary of the Divine Motherhood.

Feast of the week
Wednesday 21 February

St Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

Few people have claimed that their poetry influenced Shakespeare, Johnson, Donne, Herbert, Crashaw and Hopkins. Even fewer could boast that, whilst in prison, a torture victim and awaiting a gruesome execution, they had been thinking of Christmas and had written some of the most beautiful Christmas poetry in the English language.

Yet both claims are true of St Robert Southwell, a young Jesuit priest, arrested and charged with treason for practising his priesthood and distributing the sacraments.

At his trial, he declared, “I have been tortured ten times. I had rather have endured ten executions. I speak not this for myself, but for others; that they may not be handled so inhumanely, to drive men to desperation, if it were possible.”

As Southwell declared in his poem, *The Nativity of Christ*, written shortly before his execution:

“God is my gift. himself he freely gave me.

God’s gift am I, and none but God shall have me.”

Loving Lord, be with all those who feel lost in life’s wilderness.
Give healing, strength and comfort where they are needed.
✚ Amen.

Today:
Genesis 9:8-15
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

Monday:
Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18
Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday:
Isaiah 55:10-11
Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday:
Jonah 3:1-10
Luke 11:29-32

Thursday:
1 Peter 5:1-4
Matthew 16:13-19

Friday:
Ezekiel 18:21-28
Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday:
Deuteronomy 26:16-19
Matthew 5:43-48

Next Sunday:
Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18
Romans 8:31-34
Mark 9:2-10