



Reflections on the Word

This year, as the Universal Catholic Church celebrates the *Year of the Priest*, we have invited various priests of the Archdiocese of Toronto to reflect upon the Gospel.

Here is the next in the series of reflections that is part of our Nurturing Our Catholic Community's focus on the WORD.

February 21st, 2010 First Sunday of Lent Luke 4:1-13
Father Vito Marziliano, Pastor, St Clare's Parish

A new journey has begun: a time of renewal and discernment; a season of faith and hope that binds us together as a pilgrim people, proclaiming the good news in the words we speak and the love we share. Through the symbol of the ashes placed on our forehead, we respond to the Church's invitation to "repent and believe". Guided by the Spirit of God we set aside time to listen to God's Word and to respond in love to the "cry" of our neighbour. The readings of the First Sunday of Lent this year focus on the "journey": the journey of the Israelites through the desert and the forty days of Jesus in the desert.

Moses reminds his people that "the Lord brought us out of Egypt, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders" and God brought them "into this place and gave us this land flowing with milk and honey". The people understood that everything around them was God's gift. Milk and honey, a sign that God grants his goodness and mercy as a gift to us: we don't work for it, we do not claim it as the fruit of our labour – it is God's gift. St. Augustine invited the newly baptized at the Easter Vigil to drink a cup of milk and honey, as a sign that they had reached the Promised Land, the Church, after their journey through the desert of life.

In the desert, led by the Spirit, Jesus continues his journey. Tempted by the devil, he remains faithful to the Father's will, embracing his mission to bring salvation to the world. Strengthened by the love of the Father, Jesus relies on God's Word to combat the various temptations placed before him.

The Word which Moses proclaimed, the Word which strengthened Jesus' response, is the Word that "is near us, on our lips and in our hearts", as Paul writes to the Romans (10:8-13) in the second reading of this year's First Sunday in Lent. As we journey through the desert of life's experiences, the living Word sustains us, strengthens us, and molds us into signs of God's living and loving presence among us.

And so we welcome this time of prayer and self renewal. We too embark upon these forty days of discernment and formation, turning away from sin, detaching ourselves from whatever binds us and limits our freedom to reach out to God and to live in solidarity with our brothers and sisters.

The Word of God nourishes us. We turn to God's Word living and active in our midst. Christ, the Word of God is among us, speaking to our hearts and calling us forth to journey with him from one beginning to the next, from darkness to light, from slavery to freedom, from sin to grace. Led by the Word let us go forth with courage and strength, and let our actions and our commitment to the Gospel serve also as a sign of hope to everyone around us. Let us pray that the words uttered by our lips be the words of Jesus. Let us pray that the love coming forth from our hearts be the love of Jesus. May our presence in the journey of life be a sign to our brothers and sisters, that Christ is walking by our side and that he is the Way that leads to the fullness of joy and peace.