

FORMATION AS CHRISTIANS
FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – 21 FEBRUARY 2021



Briton Rivière - The Temptation in the Wilderness | public domain | edited www.stjosephsbrackenridge.com

LEARNING FROM THE GOSPEL OF MARK & FORMATION

As we learn from Mark's Gospel, an essential part of our formation as Christians is how to respond to the temptations of life.

In the media recently,

- we have heard of the training for those who will be administering the COVID-19 vaccines.
- we continue to learn about the trauma, terror and injustice of domestic violence, and how we need as a whole community, to know what is happening, and to advocate for justice and safety and respect for human dignity.
- and we have heard of several other accounts of abuse in politics and in society.

As citizens, our education and need for action are never ending.

Yesterday after the baptisms of seven children in the parish,
I went online to update my training and completion of set tasks for accountability.
Training is one part of formation.

Formation encompasses the whole person – physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually.

Formation involves life-long education and evaluation, reflection and action and our prayer life, both communal and individual.

The Season of Lent is an important part of our formation as Christians.
We take time to review our formation as Christians,
and our relationship with Jesus.

Last year we read Matthew's account of the Temptations in the wilderness. Next year we read Luke's account of the temptations in the wilderness. Both Matthew and Luke stress the three temptations, and the homilies explore their meanings.

But this year is Mark's account. It doesn't list the temptations. Hence it is a shorter account. Unfortunately, we could be tempted to overlook Mark.

Bring shorter, the Gospel of Mark allows us to concentrate on the **sequence of preparation, commissioning, public verification, experience and implementation.**

Let us read the Gospel together.

GOSPEL OF MARK 1:12-15

It reads:

"And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'"

PREPARATION

Mark's Gospel begins in 1:1:

"The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

The Gospel in the following verses, tells us of John the Baptist. John has prepared the way for Jesus. We pause to remember those who have gone before us. We remember with gratitude, those who prepared the way for us.

COMMISSIONING AND PUBLIC VERIFICATION

In Chapter 1, Jesus has been baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, and God has declared his favour by saying

"You are My Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The baptism also became a liturgy of his commissioning. The declaration from God above, at his baptism, had been his official public mandate.

Yet formation did not end there.

EXPERIENCE

Next came his training, whereby his resolve was tested.
He learnt about perseverance and resilience.
Facing the power of evil and not giving in to evil.
An intensive 40 days of being tested in the wilderness.

We name the beasts in our lives -
for example, poverty, abuse, discrimination, egotism.

The wilderness is not cluttered with possessions and self-centredness.
This Lent, each of us are invited to seek the simplicity of our interior wilderness.
To unclutter ourselves. To empty ourselves of lies and greed and vanity.

Jesus knew the history of God's covenant with the Israelite people.
Jesus knew the significance of being tested.
Jesus didn't walk away from the testing.
The experience gained in this period would assist Jesus in his public ministry.
Through the angels, God protected Jesus throughout the time of being tested.

IMPLEMENTATION

Then came the time to implement his ministry.
John had been arrested, and the public ministry of Jesus began.

The Gospel today says:

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee,
proclaiming the good news of God, and saying,
**'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent, and believe in the good news.'***

This introduces his mobile mission of touring and preaching,
and his message of Good News.

Mark in his brevity, all in one chapter, set out a sequence
of preparation, commissioning, public verification,
experience and implementation
in the ministry of Jesus.

Chapter 1 continues with vital aspects of implementation

- the calling of disciples,
- his healing of others,
- and his need to be sustained and uplifted and directed through prayer.

As we continue to read other chapters of Marks' Gospel
we learn more about our mission, our prayer,
our love of God and our neighbour,
the carrying of the cross,
our community as life-giving,
our need to be truly humble,

and to express our gratitude to God and to others.
Jesus is our Saviour.

During this week, we are invited to read and pray
the whole of Chapter 1 of Mark's Gospel.

Parts of it, we have already heard in previous Sundays.
Now we put it together and focus on the whole chapter
and what God's Word says to us.

With the help of God, may we direct our resolve
to love God and to love our neighbour,
face the wild beasts within and without,
find more deeply the simplicity of the wilderness,
and live out the Good News during this Lenten journey of 40 days.

May we continue to be formed by God.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

Readings: <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/022121.cfm>