As we begin the season of Lent together I would like to share a prayer from the first Sunday of Lent.

Almighty God,

whose Son fasted forty days in the wilderness,

and was tempted as we are but did not sin,

give us grace to discipline ourselves in submission to your Spirit,

that as you know our weakness, so we may know your power to save;

through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God, now and for ever.

May I please take a few moments to reflect on this Lenten prayer? First of all I believe that each one of us has to make important choices that will affect the rest of our lives every day. The Collect prayer refers to the historical event in the Bible during which Jesus was baptized and then went into the wilderness to make some decisions about His ministry. One of the choices that Jesus needed to make was whether or not He was willing to step out of private life into public life. As we all well know public figures are under extraordinary scrutiny. Those in public life are given phenomenal opportunities and yet there is also incredible stress that comes from living in public life. Jesus was trying to make the most important decisions of His life. He knew He needed to step away from the busyness of everyday life to make those decisions.

Every single one of us finds ourselves in a spiritual wilderness at one point in our lives or another. Some of us have been there several times. Let me try to explain. We can find ourselves in a wilderness experience in the midst of an illness, a marriage crisis, the loss of a job, financial worries or the death of a loved one.

These are the times that we need to think and pray and reflect. These are times of great discernment. These are also moments of intense grief and loss followed by a realization of the reality in the moment. This is when we begin again. We begin to process which direction we can go from here and how we might get there. Sometimes we need a companion on the journey. This companion may be a friend, a pastor or a therapist. We need to remember that the goal is a fresh, new beginning; a new way of being. Jesus went to the wilderness to make choices about the future. Time alone can benefit us all but if we cannot be alone in the wilderness we must find a suitable companion.

What is very sad is that we also find ourselves profoundly tempted to make unhealthy choices in the midst of our wilderness. Herbert O’Driscoll states it in this way, “For us temptation means an invitation and the opportunity to do something wrong.” Sometimes you and I can feel tested in the midst of a crisis in the wilderness but we must prayerfully focus our attention on our goals and what the gospel calls us to do and be even when we are hurting. There are moments when our fear or anger influences our ability to make healthy decisions. We realize that we are broken. These are the moments that we need to place our will under the will of God. These are the moments that we need to seek comfort in prayer, scripture and worship.

Some would ask the question, “Where is God in the midst of my pain… where is God in the midst of my grief and loss… where is God in the midst of my wilderness?” Sometimes it is hard to believe but the truth is that God is very much with us. Sometimes he weeps with us. Sometimes he sends someone to comfort us. Sometimes he opens new doors of opportunities for new beginnings and healthy relationships. Lent is a time to re-examine our choices and to commit to healthier choices in the future. All the while being keenly aware that God is with us in every moment.

Blessings

Fr Stephen