

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As the Church celebrates this First Sunday in Lent, the readings proclaimed today offer an excellent opportunity for prayer and reflection as we continue this pilgrimage into the desert. In the first reading from Deuteronomy, we see quite explicitly how God always remains faithful to His people. We see described the very difficult experience of the Jewish people during their subjugation by the Egyptians. During great hardship, the people of Israel cried to the Lord and he delivered them from slavery. "...he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression." This experience of delivery is one theme we can contemplate during the Lenten Season. Each of us, as we reflect upon our own lives and histories, knows what it is like to not be free. We find ourselves in sometimes difficult situations and circumstances. We instinctively turn to the Lord in prayer and ask for healing and deliverance. In a beautiful way we are given an inheritance from the Jewish people whose faithfulness and reliance upon the Lord is an example and model for us.

Luke's Gospel speaks of Jesus being led into the desert for forty days to be tempted by the devil. The evil one tries to lure Jesus away from His relationship and fidelity to the Father. The evil one spreads before Jesus the allure and trappings of this world. He tells Jesus he will give him endless riches and worldly powers if he capitulates to one desire: to become the subject of Satan. There are many temptations which lead us away from healthiness and a right relationship with the Lord. We must be vigilant in reading the signs of the times and not to be overwhelmed or enticed by things that inevitably separate us from God.

Throughout Christian history, one of the ways companions of Jesus have meditated upon the duality of divine and human riches has been to go into the desert, away from the epicenter of activity and noise. We ourselves may not physically have the capacity to go into the literal desert. Yet, we are invited to enter the spiritual desert, time spent apart from the busyness of life, to discern and reflect upon God's presence in our lives. This is a grace-filled and privileged time of renewal and refreshment. This is a beautiful invitation the Church offers to us. Let us be open and generous in receiving this gift over the next forty days and so dispose ourselves to appreciate most fully the meaning of the passion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There are excellent resources available to enhance our Lenten experience. I invite our parish families of St. Matthias and St. Pius to join FORMED, a Catholic guide to books, movies, podcasts, articles, and other materials - an invaluable resource made available to our parishioners. To join, go to pius.org/formed. Spiritual reading is also a great tool to enhance our prayer and reflection. I am currently reading *The Living God* by the late Monsignor Romano Guardini. One particular thought seems poignant as we enter into this holy season: *"A person who has been wounded is comforted when someone who loves him awakens the hidden energy within him so that it passes through the wound in a healing stream. A person who is spiritually dried up is comforted when someone who loves him releases the wave of life within and everything is revived. A person who has lost things of great value, who has had his work destroyed and his hopes dashed, is comforted when someone who loves him allies himself with something that lies at a deeper level, underneath the individual possession and the individual work; allies himself with the fundamental creative will, and rouses it to new activity; allies himself with that innermost soul that is above change and loss and is the eternal strength of the heart; admitting the loss that is lost in time, but winning it anew from the timelessness of faith in God."*