

## Reflections for *Isolation*

Back when we were sitting on wooden pews, surrounded by people and shaking hands during mass we heard a Gospel passage from Matthew. It was on the first Sunday of Lent that we heard the story about Jesus being tempted by the devil after being in the desert for 40 days. The ears that I heard that message on March 1<sup>st</sup> with were pre-coronavirus ears. As we get ready to celebrate Palm Sunday from the soft plush couches in our own homes March 1<sup>st</sup> seems so long ago. Revisiting this text and the entire Gospel of Matthew for that matter with coronavirus ears on April 1<sup>st</sup> opens me up to seeing what the results of being removed from the crowds, withdrawing from society, family and friends *can* be.

No we don't like staying inside, or refraining from seeing people we care about. We miss our kids going to school daily, we miss filling out NCAA brackets and watching live sports on TV. Jesus likely wasn't too thrilled about being in the desert and hungry for 40 days, but dare I say it turned into something that is pretty awesome!

It is at the end of Jesus' 40 days that the devil comes to tempt him. And it is after experiencing 40 days of solitude that Jesus is able to remain strong and firm in his sense of self and conviction of faith against all that the devil has to offer. Hearing this story now with "coronavirus ears" I can't help but think that while fasting in the desert for 40 days is no doubt trying and maybe just slightly more agonizing than sheltering in place until April 30<sup>th</sup> Jesus seems strengthened by this experience. Perhaps, he figures out his game plan for public ministry or maybe he grows in self-confidence and decides once he gets out of the desert he is going to step into who is created to be.

Once Jesus abandons his albeit self-imposed social distancing and leaves the desert he begins his public ministry. It starts out slowly, maybe with a handshake here and there and some preaching in Capernaum. He begins this preaching by himself, but then he calls his first disciples Simon Peter and Andrew. Then the brothers James and John are called to join his crew. From here Matthew describes Jesus as having "fame" and drawing "great crowds." And why wouldn't he? He delivers the Sermon on the Mount (a classic that perhaps similar to a Neil Diamond song about hands touching hands just about everyone knows), he heals people, stories in the form of parables flow from his mouth and finally he journeys to Calvary where he is crucified and more importantly resurrected. All of this follows his 40 days ALONE in the desert!

Our 40 days of Lent is almost up and I'd be willing to wager that most of us have given up more for Lent this year than we had anticipated we would on Ash Wednesday. What we shouldn't give up on is the hope of the life-changing event of the resurrection and how these days of being withdrawn from the world and others can strengthen us.

Matthew tells us of Jesus' experience in the desert "angels came and ministered to him." In the midst of our isolation I see and hear stories about angels ministering to people. Whether it's through the donation of PPE equipment to healthcare

professionals, prayers being lifted up on behalf of others, or groceries left on doorsteps caring for one another continues. As we remain sheltered in place we are not only being given angels to minister to us, but we are no doubt angels to others. Imagine what can be done if we allow this time of solitude to strengthen us for the day when we are gathered back together in the joy of the Easter season.

**Questions for Reflection:**

1. How can I take this time of isolation and social distancing to pray about and discern who I am created to be?
2. What will my game plan be or what do I hope to do once sheltering in place ends?
3. Who has been an angel ministering to me?
4. How can I or how have I been an angel ministering to others during this time?