

## First Sunday of Lent, Cycle B

*Mark 1:12-15*

### HOMILY

Immediately after his baptism in the River Jordan Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. What we have today is a leap from the River Jordan experience to the wilderness experience, from an experience of baptism to the experience of temptation, from affirmation of identity as God's beloved Son to an extreme and hostile environment and from the experience of Holy Spirit to struggling with the anti-spirit

It is said of Jesus that in the wilderness '*he was with the wild beasts*'. Wild beasts are more symbolic than actual. They suggest the intensity of the struggle of Jesus in the wilderness. Whereas the Holy Spirit had come down upon him at his baptism in the wilderness Jesus encountered an anti-Spirit. This anti-Spirit is what the gospel reading calls 'Satan.' The anti-Spirit is made real by the image of wild beasts. Q: What is happening here? It means that the very identity of Jesus as the beloved Son of God, was being put to the test in a very hostile way. He was engaged in a profound struggle with evil. One thing we have to know here is that, all the same, Jesus didn't have to face those wild beasts in the wilderness alone. *The angels looked after him*'. God was caring and providing for his beloved Son, helping him to overcome the onslaught of the wild beasts.

That's why he came out of the wilderness experience fully charged and all the stronger to begin his ministry. He immediately went to Galilee to proclaim, '*the kingdom of God is close at hand*'.

The experience of Jesus in the wilderness can find an echo in our own lives. There are times when our own identity as baptized sons and daughters of God will be challenged, our own identity as priest will be at stake, our own identity as Eucharistic ministers, a teacher, a trusted figure in this or some other community can be shaken and be subject to the test. The whole point is that we can find ourselves in '*wilderness moments*.' The wild beasts are many and varifocal: they seek to weaken our hopeful and loving faith, seeking to bear us down.

Lent is a season when we need to come to know that Jesus didn't have to face those wild beasts in the wilderness alone.