

Reflection – Bob Buescher – 3/5/17

On the first Sunday of Lent, we always read one of the accounts of Jesus undergoing temptation or testing in the desert. Each of the three evangelists who include this story in their gospels place it between the baptism of Jesus and the start of his public ministry.

As I spent some time with today's passage from the gospel of Matthew, I was left with some questions.

What happened in the desert BEFORE the encounter between Jesus and the tempter? What had Jesus experienced that he was able to respond with such a clear understanding of his relationship with the One who was calling him to ministry? How did Jesus become so completely grounded in the love of God that he was able to make the choices he made in the face of evil?

My questioning leads me to some new insight into what the season of Lent is about.

Going into to the desert or wilderness is always symbolic of a process of change, of conversion, of having our assumptions shaken up. The Jewish people wandered in the desert between liberation from slavery and their entry to the promised land. John the Baptist spent time there. When you enter the wilderness, the comforts and distractions of day-to-day life get stripped away.

This Lenten Season we are again blessed to accompany two people preparing for sacraments of initiation at the Easter Vigil.

Matt Hughes will be baptized, confirmed and receive first Eucharist. Sue Davis, who began her Christian journey in the Baptist tradition, will be welcomed into full communion with the Catholic Church.

Our Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults presumes that the entire community joins with and supports the Elect and Candidates for full communion throughout the Lenten season. We are all invited to walk into the wilderness with Matt and Sue for what is like a 40-day retreat.

As Fr. Tom said in his homily on Ash Wednesday, our Lenten journey is not a matter of the head...or the will. It is a journey of the heart. Together, we seek to be united with Christ in the same spirit that was evident in his entire ministry. Healing the sick. Embracing the outcasts. Even handing over his life for what he believed.

This year's Lenten liturgies will include some specific actions marking the progress of Matt and Sue's journey toward the Easter sacraments.

Today we have a Rite of Sending. Our assembly will hear testimony of Matt's readiness for baptism. Then we will witness his enrollment in our parish "Book of the

Elect" before sending him for presentation to Archbishop Schnurr during the diocesan Rite of Election later today. In a similar way, Sue Davis will be sent for recognition by the bishop as a Candidate for full communion. From this day forward, Matt is no longer called a catechumen; he is one of the Elect, those chosen by God for initiation at Easter.

On the third, fourth and fifth Sundays of Lent, we will join together in praying over Matt during mass. These prayers for the Elect flow out of powerful encounters in the gospel passages we will hear proclaimed. From the earliest days, these stories from the gospel of John have been central to our church's understanding of baptism:

- Third Sunday – Jesus' promise of "living water" to the Samaritan woman at the well
- Fourth Sunday – the cure of the man born blind and a new way of seeing through the eyes of faith
- Fifth Sunday – the raising of Lazarus and Jesus' command to "come out" and be freed from death

The prayers for Elect on the third, fourth and fifth Sunday of Lent are traditionally called "scrutinies." That term needs some explanation.

It is not our community or the church scrutinizing the Elect. Rather, it is our loving God searching the hearts of Matt and each of us who are already baptized.

The purpose of the scrutinies is to pray that whatever is weak, defective or sinful can be uncovered and healed...and that what is upright, strong and good be strengthened and brought forth for the good of God's reign on earth.

May our walking with Matt and Sue during this year's Lenten journey be a source of strength for them. And for all of us, may our Lenten journey be a source of renewed joy in spreading the good news to all creation.