

Listen to His Voice*

A mother camel and her baby are talking one day and the baby camel asks, "Mom why have we got these huge three-toed feet?" The mother replies, "To enable us trek across the soft sand of the desert without sinking." "And why have we got these long, heavy eyelashes?" "To keep the sand out of our eyes on the trips through the desert" replies the mother camel. "And Mom, why have we got these big humps on our backs?" The mother, now a little impatient with the boy replies, "They are there to help us store fat for our long treks across the desert, so we can go without water for long periods." "OK, I get it!" says the baby camel, "We have huge feet to stop us sinking, long eyelashes to keep the sand from our eyes and humps to store water. Then, Mom, why the heck are we here in the Toronto zoo?" Modern life sometimes makes one feel like a camel in a zoo. And like camels in a zoo we need sometimes to go into the desert in order to discover who we truly are. Lent invites us to enter into this kind of desert experience.

The desert was the birthplace of the people of God of the first covenant. The Hebrew people who escaped from Egypt as scattered tribes arrived at the Promised Land as one nation under God. It was in the desert that they become a people of God by covenant. In the course of their history when their love and faithfulness to God grew cold, the prophets would suggest their return to the desert to rediscover their identity, their vocation and their mission as a way of reawakening their faith and strengthening their covenant relationship with God. The great prophets Elijah and John the Baptist were people of the desert: they lived in the desert, ate desert food and adopted a simple desert lifestyle. The desert is the university where God teaches His people.

In today's gospel we read that after Jesus was baptized "the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him" (Mark 1:12-13). Where else but the desert could you have such a meaningful encounter of the Holy Spirit as well as Satan, of the wild beasts as well as the holy angels? The desert was the school where Jesus came to distinguish between the voice of God which he should follow and the voice of Satan which is temptation. How many voices do we hear from the moment we get up in the morning till the moment we go to sleep at night? The countless voices in the daily paper, the soliciting voices on the radio and the television, the voices of those who live and work with us, not forgetting our own unceasing inner voices. In the desert we leave most of these voices behind to focus on distinguishing between the guiding voice of God and the tempting voice of Satan.

In the desert we come to know ourselves, our strengths and weaknesses, and our divine calling. In the desert Jesus encountered beasts and angels. There are wild beasts and angels in every one of us. Sometimes, owing to our superficial self-knowledge, we fail to recognize the wild beasts in us and give in to vain glory, or we fail to recognize the angel in us and give in to self-hatred. But in the silence and recollection of the desert we come to terms with ourselves as we really are, we are reconciled with the beasts and the angels in our lives and then we begin to experience peace again for the first time. Lent is the time for the desert experience. We cannot all afford to buy a camel and head off for the desert. But we can all create a desert space in our overcrowded lives. We can set aside a place and time to be alone daily with God, a time to distance ourselves from the many noises and voices that bombard our lives every day, a time to hear God's word, a time to rediscover who we are before God, a time to say yes to God and no to Satan as Jesus did. Welcome to Lent! Welcome to the desert!

When you say "yes" to God and not to Satan, you will know.

That YOU ARE LOVED, Deacon Dan **Homily by Fr. Munachi Ezeogy Cssp*

