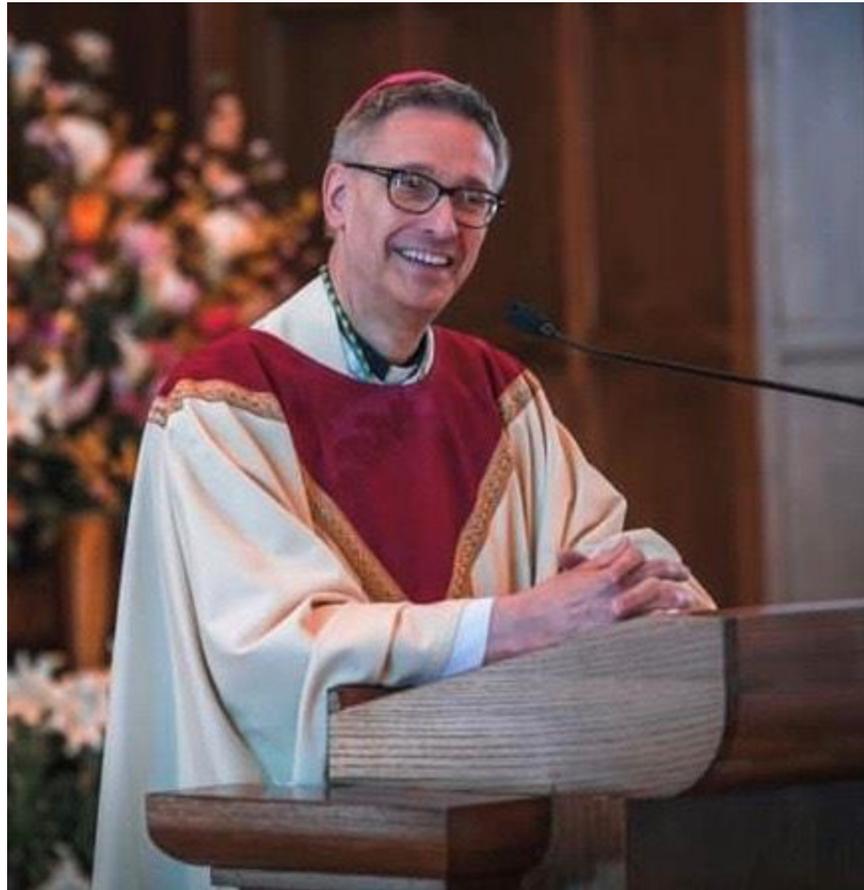


Bishop Mark's Lenten Message



One of the best known Bible stories is about the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert. The Gospel of Mark 1:12-13, describes it in three sentences: "At that point the Spirit led Jesus out toward the desert. He stayed in the wasteland forty days, put to the test there by Satan. He was with the wild beasts and angels waited on him." (If you want more details, read Matthew 4:1-11 or Luke 4:1-13.) It's interesting to note that Luke tells us in his version of the story that after these temptations Satan left Jesus, but he was waiting for another opportunity to tempt him.

In the agony in the garden, Jesus urged his disciples to pray that they would not be put to the test (Luke 22:39-46). And Jesus was tempted by soldiers and a criminal crucified beside him to save

them and himself. For obvious reasons, they wanted to avoid suffering and death (Luke 23:32-49).

The Church teaches us that the season of Lent is a time for each of us acknowledge our sins, and to turn away from whatever tempts us to sin. But there is more. It is a time for turning toward the Father. It is a time to use all the means available for us to pursue holiness. These include prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and the reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist. And it is highly recommended that we ask the Holy Spirit to help us. That's the same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the desert.

When was the last time you thought about your own desert? It often looks rather appealing. It may come in the form of overindulging in things like food, drink, drugs, accumulation of material things, or the idolatry that is found in pornography or other sins of impurity. And how often does the preoccupation with things that are so bad for us make us forget that we are made in the image and likeness of God?

During the holy season of Lent, we are invited to spend some time with Jesus in the desert. We are not alone because the same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the desert will lead us, guide us, encourage us, and strengthen us so that we may experience A LIFE-CHANGING LENT.

Jeffrey A. Kottler, professor emeritus of counseling at California State University (Psychology Today, Jan. 6, 2011) asks a fundamental question: What does it take to transform your life in a way that you find greater meaning and satisfaction in what you do on a daily basis? He readily acknowledges that religious or spiritual involvement is a worthwhile path to follow. As you reflect this Lent, pay attention to your own thoughts about where you discover the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and how you might experience A LIFE-CHANGING LENT.

