

## **A reflection on the first week of Lent**

*Forsake me not, O Lord. Ps. 38*

The crowd of people on the banks of the River Jordan had walked long distances to be there to hear the man known as John the Baptist. Perhaps, they thought, if they found themselves compelled to do so and brave enough, they would walk forward and be immersed in the river by the Prophet. On this day John told the crowd that he baptized using water, but that one was coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. As they pondered his message, John's cousin from Nazareth stepped forward to be received with the others. On this day, for the crowd, for John and for Jesus, everything would be changed forever. Afterwards, while Jesus was praying, the Holy Spirit descended and a voice came from heaven, saying "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." God's promise was being fulfilled.

What followed was not as one might expect. There was no celebration. Scripture does not tell us what the crowd saw and heard or what their response was. Immediately upon this event, Jesus was driven by the Spirit to the desert where he fasted and was tempted for 40 days. Although he was among wild beasts, the angels ministered to him. From the waters of the Jordan to the wasteland of the desert—this was Jesus' entry into his ministry.

Sometimes it's that way for us. One minute we are filled with assuredness and ready to take on the world. Perhaps our supervisor has praised our work. Frequently, patients and their families tell us that they are well pleased with us. There is fulfillment and recognition. Yet, we can also experience the wasteland of doubt in ourselves and our abilities. Perhaps we doubt that we are worthy of God's love. We thirst for God's love and seek assurance that we will be worthy of salvation.

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For centuries Christians have used the days of Lent for introspection, self-examination and repentance—a wilderness experience of the spirit. The desert wasteland has always been a symbol of desolation of spirit, a valley of dry bones, where the soul knows nothing but that it thirsts for God. Why would anyone willingly choose such a path of discovery? Just for that reason—we follow this path into the desert to better understand who we are in God’s sight and the path leads us back to God who says to each of us: “You are my beloved child.”

The music, by Margaret Rizza and Kevin Duncan, is from the album "Her Music for Piano," Kevin Mayhew Publishers.

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