

Homily notes

for Sunday 26 February and Sunday 4 March

Sunday 26 February – Mark 1:12-15

Today we hear how Jesus goes out into the desert for forty days and is put to the test. And how after this time, he goes into Galilee and begins to proclaim the gospel. Jesus spends time in the desert alone in order to be strengthened and refreshed. It is a time of preparation for the mission that lies ahead and a time during which he draws closer to God.

Lent is a time when we try to do the same. We try to recharge our spiritual batteries, to spend time in prayer and reflection, and to draw closer to God. We ask forgiveness for the mistakes we have made and we try to live the kind of life God wants for us.

During Lent we try to focus on the things that are really important in our lives. One way in which we do this is to give something up. In denying ourselves something that we would otherwise take for granted, while spending more time in prayer, we can be led to reflect on what life means for those who daily have to do without, those who do not even have enough to meet their basic needs.

For example, people like 10 year old Zimi in rural Zimbabwe. Until recently she and others in her community had to walk for several hours a day to collect water, preventing them from growing crops, herding their cattle, going to school or playing with friends

“You don’t think about water until there’s a problem getting it; then you think about it all the time,” she says.

Through support from CAFOD, supported by you, Zimi’s community now has a borehole to access water, saving them hours each day in which they can work and play.

Zimi believes that “Water is very precious; it should be shared by all people on earth.”

Will you take time for your desert moment this Lent, time to pray and listen to God? And time to reflect on what we are called to do with our lives, how we can live in solidarity with people living in poverty around the world? In transforming our own lives, through our prayers and through our actions, we can help people who are poor to transform their lives too.

Sunday 4 March - Mark 9:2-10

Jesus takes Peter, James and John up a mountain so that they can be by themselves. Then he is transfigured before their eyes, as his clothes become brilliantly white and Moses and Elijah appear in conversation with him.

The disciples do not know what to do and they struggle to comprehend the change that has taken place. This transformation shows us what Jesus has in store – death and resurrection.

We are shown the power of God's transforming love which can change lives, bringing light where there is darkness and hope where there is despair.

We spend Lent trying to draw closer to God and discerning what is asked of us as Christians. How do we do as God asks in today's gospel reading and listen to Jesus in our lives? Fr Dean Brackley, was a Jesuit priest and CAFOD partner who worked in El Salvador at the Central American University. He described how an encounter with people living in poverty was a transformative experience for him and for many others.

"These people shake us up because they bring home to us that things are much worse in the world than we dared to imagine. But that is only one side of the story: If we allow them to share their suffering with us, they communicate some of their hope as well.... It seems that they offer us the privileged place (although not the only place) to encounter the truth which sets us free."

So how can we encounter these people in our lives? After all, we do not all have the opportunity to travel to El Salvador.

We will not get to actually meet 10-year-old Zimi, who features on this year's CAFOD envelope and who used to spend several hours a day collecting water. Time which could have been spent on her schoolwork or in playing with friends.

Perhaps the encounter comes from recognising that when we hear or read the story of someone like Zimi, whether that is in CAFOD materials, in a magazine or on the television or radio, it is not just a story, but the life of a real person just like us.

Recognising Christ in others, in those we meet and those we may never meet but whose stories touch us from around the world can lead to a real transformation on our lives. It may enable us to see the world differently, to recognise what is really important, and through our prayers and actions to enable others to change their lives for the better too. So that, for example, everyone can have access to clean water.