

12-6-15

Pastoral Prayer

We thank you, God that you never leave us or forsake us, but are ever true to your covenant to be our God. Interrupt the silence of our captivity with a voice that speaks deliverance. A voice that is life-giving, as a stream in the desert which carries refreshment.

God of Mercy, we pray that you continue to come to us according to your promise, completing that which is not yet finished within us.

Come to us, Lord Christ.

That we hear and heed your voice, calling us forth from the wilderness of complacency and distress into the land of promise.

Come to us, Lord Christ.

We wait patiently for you. Help us to discern your leading and follow you humbly knowing that you will take us safely to our true home.

Come to us, Lord Christ.

Assure those who despair and watch over those who dwell in wilderness.

Come to us, Lord Christ. Amen.

Call to Offering

What is the role of the wilderness periods of our lives? The wilderness can be a place of solitude, and solitude can be a “furnace of transformation,” claims Henri Nouwen. He speaks eloquently of the vital role of solitude in our lives:

“Without solitude we remain victims of our society and continue to be entangled in the illusions of the false self. Jesus himself entered into this furnace. There he was tempted with the three compulsions of the world: to be relevant (turn stones into loaves), to be spectacular (throw yourself down), and to be powerful (I will give you all these kingdoms).

“There he affirmed God as the only source of his identity (You must worship the Lord your God and serve God alone). Solitude is the place of the great struggle and the great encounter – the struggle against the compulsions of the false self, and the encounter with the loving God who offers [to become] the substance of the new self.”

Nouwen suggests that solitude is “that holy place where ministry and spirituality embrace each other ... it is the place of conversion, the place where the old self dies and the new self is born, the place where the emergence of the new man and the new woman occurs.” Nouwen concludes: “Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in [God’s] own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world. Solitude is the place of our salvation.” And what is the fruit of the wilderness? “It is compassion. Compassion is the fruit of solitude and the basis of all ministry.” (Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, New York: The Seabury Press, 1981, pp. 25-33.)

Offertory Sentence

Some of us have lost our bearings, can’t find our way. We have lived as we ought not to have lived, done those things which we ought not to have done. Come to us, Lord, bring us home.

Commissioning and Benediction

Let us go out ready and waiting to hear and eager to respond to the voice in the wilderness announcing the Advent of God into our lives and into the world.

The voice of Jesus, God who comes, speaks blessing upon us and encourages us homeward. Go now in peace.

Amen.