

We live in a mobile society. That goes without saying. Many of us are constantly jumping in the car and going from one place to another, running all over God's green earth. And sometimes (often because of the hectic nature of our day-to-day lives) we **forget something on our journey**. Who hasn't left his or her phone at home by mistake? That's a really bad feeling.

Or what student hasn't forgotten his or her homework or backpack or lunch?

Or you get pulled over for speeding, only to find that you forgot to put the insurance card in the glove compartment. Or you go to a restaurant specifically to use a coupon, but then realize it's still on the kitchen counter. And those of us of a certain age remember when having a physical ticket was required to get into concerts or plays or sporting events.

There was no such remedy as having the person "look it up on the computer". If you didn't have your ticket, you didn't get in. I've even read stories of parents who drove miles and miles home from some sort of event before realizing that they were **missing one of their children**. Yikes!

Yes, forgetting to **bring necessary things** is an easy thing to do

A few days ago we, as a faith community, **began a journey**. And this journey is a **sacred journey** --- forty days in the desert, in imitation of our Lord. And as you know, this holy journey is rarely easy, no matter how many times we have made similar journeys in the past.

It requires focus and commitment. It requires patience. It requires perseverance. It requires humility. It requires generosity of heart. And it requires sacrifice. **That's a long list.**

And it would be a shame if we **forgot** to bring everything we **needed**, forgot something **essential** --- something that, if left behind, would make our journey (in a sense) a kind of failure.

And yet we often do precisely that

--- **forget the thing we need most.**

Oh, but that's not exactly right. You see, what we often forget to bring on our Lenten journey is not a "**what**" at all. It's a "**who**". You guessed it. Many of us start down this forty day journey and forget to bring . . . **God**. You heard right. God.

That may seem like a ridiculous statement, and you may find yourself wondering what I'm talking about. What I mean is this --- If we are not careful, these forty days can **be all about us** --- **our accomplishments, our will power, and our egos**. Sometimes I can fall into the trap of **feeling a little too good** about what I'm able to "do" during this sacred time, find myself filled with a little **too much pride** (instead of humility).

At times it's as if my Lenten observances are tests I give myself to "**see if I can do it**", not so that I can grow closer to my God.

And those times when I **actually accomplish** what I set out to do (such as not eat candy, or read my bible every day for half an hour, or not drink alcohol, or never fail to abstain from meat when I'm supposed to, or go to every single thing the parish is offering, or donate to more charities than the year before) there is a temptation to come away thinking,

“Boy, I'm a pretty great person. I did it! **Look what I accomplished.** Way to go!”

And that is in no way related to the **spirit of this holy season.**

In today's Gospel passage from Mark we hear how the Spirit **“drove Jesus out into the desert”**, where he remained for forty days. (Matthew and Luke say that Jesus was “led” into the desert by the Spirit.) In either case, one thing seems to be pretty clear --- Jesus did not go out into the desert **alone**. This was not Jesus simply **doing what HE wanted**. This was not Jesus **fashioning his own plan** or satisfying his own will or ego (if I can use that sort of language). **E**

Rather, this was Jesus being **motivated by the Spirit** to embrace the sacred plan of the Father --- for whatever happened in the desert, however we want to understand this Scripture story --- Jesus returned from that journey **ready to embark on his public ministry**, ready to fulfill whatever his Father would ask of him.

And the **clarity** with which he emerged from that experience, the complete **focus** he would have in the years ahead, the **strength and courage** he would muster in the face of adversity and sorrow and pain and disappointment, was only possible **because it was God's Spirit** that was **leading** him and **guiding** him and **empowering** him every step of the way. **PAUSE**

And so it is with us. Lent will never be fruitful, never draw us more deeply into the mystery of God, never enable us to be more faithful, **if we try to go it alone**. And even though we can't ever fully understand the **interplay of Father, Son and Spirit**, even though we can't fully get our minds around the **Incarnation**, even though we can't know exactly how our experiences differ from those of Jesus, one thing is clear --- Jesus couldn't do what he did **without God**, and neither can we.

And so let's make sure we strive to “do Lent right”. Let's not fall into the trap of making this holy season some sort of contest or challenge to see if “we can do it”. Rather let's see it as a **sacred opportunity** --- an opportunity to **love** God a little more deeply, live our lives a little more **faithfully**, and carry out the work of God a little more **humbly**. Put simply --- as we carry out our Lenten observances --- as we pray a little more, and give to the poor, and make small sacrifices --- let's not see it simply as something we “do”.

Instead let's **take God with us** into the desert and see what **God wants to “do” in us.**