

Lenten Reflection

by Fr Dominic Borg, OCD

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"Heavenly Father we give You thanks for the gift of this day. We thank You for the Eucharist you gave us this morning and for the gift of Your Word. We ask You to continue to help us in our weaknesses, to prepare our heart as a fertile soil ready to receive the seed of love that You want to implant in our lives and bring it Yourself to its fruition for Your Own glory and the glory of the Church. We ask you all this in Jesus' Name. Amen."

All of you by now have seen or taken a copy of the "Message of Lent" by the Pope. On the last page, in the second paragraph, it says; "during Lent, we prepare to relive the Paschal Mystery, which sheds the light of hope upon the whole of our existence, even its most complex and painful aspects. Holy Week will again set before us this mystery of salvation in the evocative rites of the Easter Triduum."

Lent comes to us with vocabulary, terminology and symbols that, although we see them during the year, it seems that during the time of Lent, they have the tendency to surface more and to come in front of us with their message. One of these symbols is the symbol of the desert. In every Church that you go to during Lent, in front of the altar, they place cactus, the symbol of the desert, of the wilderness.

There is a sentence, which has a lot of truth in it. And the sentence says; "It is the wilderness that forms the Jew." The Jew is not the Jew that lives in Israel. The Jew stands for the man of God or the person of God. The wilderness has a special mission in our life. Lent, because it brings in front of us this symbol of the wilderness, challenges you and me to try to enter more fully into its meaning and how we are going to apply it in our lives.

The people were in the wilderness in a deserted place, and the Disciples said to Jesus Christ, "Send them in the villages and in the towns around so that they will find some food to buy because here in the wilderness how are we going to feed them? This is a deserted place." We know that He fed them. They all ate and they all were satisfied and there were leftovers.

The wilderness comes with the first message. The first message of the wilderness is God's Presence. In the Jewish tradition, there is a term. They call it "Shiviti". Sometimes you will be passing through a corridor in their halls, in their Synagogues and you will see just the name itself, just this word "Shiviti". When you enter into a Synagogue you will find at the front, written, "Shiviti Adonai L'Negdi Tamid". It is a quote that is taken from Psalm 16, verse 8, which means, "I am ever mindful of Your (the Lord's) Presence."

In the wilderness, the first message Moses gets is, "Take off your sandals because this is Holy Ground." God's Presence is there. And as the Disciple asked his Rabbi, "Rabbi, why did God speak to Moses from a dry bush?" He could have spoken to him from a majestic mountain or from a place of gushing water, like Niagara Falls. Why did He choose a dry bush to reveal Himself to Moses? The Rabbi replied, "Because God wanted to teach us, as He taught Moses, that even a dry bush is not devoid of His Presence." "That even a dry bush is not devoid of God's Presence." Now imagine if a dry bush is not devoid of God's Presence, how much more the wilderness is not devoid of God's Presence. It is the wilderness that makes the Jew. It's no wonder then that in the history of Israel, the time that the Jewish people passed in the wilderness is called the Golden Age of the History of Israel. The people were in this wilderness and we read in Hosea this beautiful verse; "Therefore, I will now allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her heart." (Chapter 2, verse 14)

God is alluring us, attracting us, drawing us, pulling us towards the wilderness especially during this time of Lent. Why? To speak tenderly to our heart. He does not lead us to the wilderness to put us into a situation of penance, to see us down or depressed. This is not the case. He wants to strip us of what the city and the towns and the villages give us. The city, the town, the villages, stand for security. They stand for false security rather than security. It's false security. And when God wants to enter deeply into our life, cannot do this in the city because there are too many distractions. The bigger the crisis, the more the crises is in depth, the more the Lord pulls us into the wilderness to be able to reach our being.

Mary and Martha are facing the death of their brother Lazarus. They sent a message to Jesus. "He whom You

love is sick." Jesus Christ delayed, as usual. God seems to be slow in answering our prayers. As the Biblical scholar would say, "God always pays His bills, but He has a habit of paying them in arrears". We read this in Habakkuk; "If I delay from coming, wait for me, because I will surely come." So there is the death of the brother Lazarus. A message comes to Martha that the Lord is coming, and Martha went running to meet him. She entered into a dialogue, a serious dialogue. This is something that you and I, in our Lectio Divina have to learn how to do. Dialoguing with the Word, open our heart and let that Word echo its message, literally repeating it. Like when you go in a place that is deserted, in the wilderness, in a valley and you say your name, you hear the name echoing and echoing, coming back at you, nearly haunting you, literally haunting you.

So the message came to Martha that the Lord is coming and Martha went to meet Him and entered into a dialogue with the Lord. Then Martha left and she went to Mary and told her, "The Teacher is here and wants to speak to you." The Teacher is here and wants to speak to each one of us, but in order to speak clearly to each one of us, He has to take us outside our village, outside of our security because our securities become a stumbling block to experience God's Providence, to experience his intervention in our lives. And so Mary at first is hesitant. "What do you mean to tell me that the Teacher is here?" "The Teacher is the Author of Life and I am standing in front of the death of my brother. Do you mean to tell me that the Teacher is present in the death of my brother?" She looks at her. She knew from where she had come. She just came running. Martha had come. So Mary stood up and went running and the Gospel tells us that they thought she was going to run towards the tomb to cry there. But no! She went to meet Jesus. Now notice what St. John tells us. St John says, "Jesus was still in the same place that Martha had met him, outside the village." John uses those words, "Outside of the village." They are in the Gospel. This is not imagination. This is not a reflection that I am making. It is written in the Gospel. Jesus was still in the same place where Martha met him, outside of the village. And there, Mary can enter into a serious dialogue with Jesus Christ, the way Martha could enter into a serious dialogue with Jesus Christ, and the same also with you and with me. We can enter into a serious dialogue with Jesus Christ when we are outside of our village, when a history comes to you and to me and pushes us to go running outside of the village. What do we say when we are passing through a crises, when there is some pressure upon us at work, at home, in our family? We say we need to take a holiday. "I need to run away. I need to run away from this situation because this situation is killing me." But, quite often we run away in the wrong direction. There is the question, "Who am I?" But there is a better question, "Where am I? In which direction am I heading?"

That was the question that Judge Holmes asked to the train conductor. Judge Holmes was a very well known judge in Washington. He was also very well known for being absent-minded. There was always a lot of work, a lot of pressure on him. Once he was late going to work or shall I say, as usual he was late, and was running to the train station. The first train that came, he hopped on it, sat down and breathed freely that now he was on the right train. The train conductor came to collect the tickets. He couldn't find his ticket. The conductor told him it was no problem because he knew who he was. He said to the judge, "When you find it you can send it by mail." Judge Holmes said, "Thank you, thank you sir for your kind understanding, but you don't seem to understand the problem. The problem is not whether I have a ticket or not, the problem is, in which direction am I heading. Is the train going in the direction that I want to go? Judge Holmes had a lot of these things . Once he was entering this mental institution thinking he was entering the University. The security guard stopped him and asked where he was heading. Judge Holmes replied, "The University". The guard told him that this was not the University. The judge asked, "What is this then?" The guard replied "A mental institution, sir". "I suppose there is not much difference", said the Judge. The Security Guard told him, "Of course there is a difference sir, once you enter here, we will not let you out unless you show some improvement".

It is the same brothers and sisters in the wilderness, in the desert. Once the Lord leads us into the desert, we are not the same people that come out. The wilderness strips us. It has the power to strip us, to take off these barnacles that are keeping back the ship, reducing the speed, wasting energy. There is a lot of energy that is wasted because the barnacles reduce the speed of the ship. But once the ship enters the dock and it is cleaned of those barnacles, then it can regain speed. Everyone thinks they refurbished the engines. They are using less gas. It's not about using less diesel, it's that there are less barnacles reducing the speed, creating an obstruction. It is the same with you and me.

The Lord is going to lead us during these forty days of Lent into the wilderness to be far away from many distractions, to enter into a serious dialogue with him to learn what we read in Deuteronomy Chapter 8. In

Deuteronomy, Chapter 8, we read, "The Lord took you by the long way, not the short way, to know what is in your heart. Whether you will keep His Commandments or not and He let you hunger to feed you with Manna which neither you nor your father knew about, so that you will know that man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord". And then comes that beautiful statement of God's Providence in the wilderness, "These forty years in the wilderness, your feet did not swell, neither your coat wear out upon you". Your feet did not swell, neither your coat wear out upon you. Why? Sometimes when we enter into a crisis, when we enter into the wilderness, thinking that the Lord wants to kill us with famine, we forget the words that Jesus Christ said to the disciples, "Beware of the yeast of Herod and the yeast of the Pharisees." The disciples thought that it was because they did not have bread, that Jesus was telling them that. Jesus Christ told them, "What are you saying among yourselves that you do not have bread? Why is your problem food, food, food? Do you not understand yet? Do you not understand? When there were the five loaves, and the two fish, how many people were fed with them?" They told Him, "Five thousand", and Jesus said to them "and yet you do not understand?"

We do not understand that the wilderness is not just a moment that the Lord gives to you and to me, a moment of grace just to divest us. It is also a moment of grace to make us wear his garment. As St. Paul says, "Put on Jesus Christ." It brings out our nakedness, but at the same time, it makes us wear the Grace of God. "Put on Jesus Christ." What we hear in the wilderness are the words that the Prophet Jeremiah has heard; words brothers and sisters, that will help you a lot. I have it here, the quote, it is Jeremiah, Chapter 29, verse 11, "I know the plans that I have in mind for you - it is Yahweh who speaks - plans for peace, not disaster, reserving a future full of hope for you".

My plans for you are not plans for disaster but they are plans for hope. So the wilderness, during this time of Lent, comes to you and to me with many messages: first of all, the message to form us, to mold us. In the wilderness, unless you have a guide, you are lost. But the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, will guide you and me. As Jesus Christ told us, "The Spirit will guide you in to all the Truth and the Truth will set you free".

Between our Egypt and the Promised Land, there is this wilderness and there is no other way. There is no other way. You don't try to go by plane. You don't try to go by sea. You have to go by foot through the wilderness. There is no Saint, not even St. Therese, who could go through another way, even if she goes with the modern technology of the lift and the elevator. But still there is the wilderness, there is the pain and the suffering in her life. She knew how to handle it. But there was pain and suffering in her life. And suffering and pain stands for the symbol of the wilderness, as the Pope has told us, "During Lent, we prepare to relive the Paschal Mystery, which sheds the light of hope, (which sheds the light of hope, Jeremiah - reserving a future full of hope for you) which sheds the light of hope upon the whole of our existence, even its most complex and painful aspects."

It's not easy. No, to journey in the wilderness, is not easy. The wilderness here in the words of the Pope, scares us. That moment is complex and painful, but you have to pass through it. There is no spirituality whatsoever without the terminology of the wilderness. There is no spirituality because in order to put on something, first you have to divest.

Even Jesus Christ, at the Last Supper, divested Himself from His garments, put on the towel, and then He put aside the towel and put on again His garments. "Laying aside His garment ... when He finished, He took again His garments". Laying aside His life, "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it back again." "He is the Good Shepard and He lays down His life for His sheep." That is the symbol of the wilderness, laying aside his garments, putting aside his life. The people of God came victorious out of the wilderness because in the wilderness, they are going to meet the giant. In the wilderness there are the wild beasts that are going to be encountered. Christ led by the Spirit, went into the wilderness to be tempted. The Angels came to his rescue. But in the wilderness there were wild beasts. And in the wilderness comes the temptation of the bread.

One of the first words that we learn apart from calling Mamma, Papa, I love you, is I need. I need. Your children come to Mamma, "I need these books." "I need something to eat." There is this need in our life and in the wilderness we feel this need, the need of bread and we are tempted to think that security comes from material things. And so the devil tempts Jesus Christ the way he tempts you, and Jesus Christ stands in the wilderness as the Great Teacher, "Man does not live by bread alone, but by every Word that proceeds out of

the mouth of the Lord." And in our wilderness, he is teaching us. It seems that God led us into this wilderness, as here Hosea has told us, "I will take back my people to the wilderness and speak tenderly to their heart."

Jesus Christ is in the wilderness to teach us, and the classroom is none other than our heart. The Word has to enter into our heart. It is there that we have to learn how to pray. We do not pray with our minds brothers and sisters, we do not pray with our lips, we pray with our heart. "These people praise Me with their lips but their hearts are far away from Me."

So, the wilderness stands as a powerful weapon in beating the temptations of the evil one. The evil one tells us, "In the wilderness, you'll die. In the wilderness, you don't have any security. In the wilderness, you get lost. In the wilderness, there is no one there to help you."

But it is in the wilderness that the people of God discovered the Ten Commandments. It is there where Moses is coming down with the Ten Commandments in his hands and he has to learn the same experience that we have to learn. If we want to carry the Word of God, we have to stop judging our brothers and sisters. Moses had no problems in carrying the Words, the tablets. It was no problem coming down carrying them. But as soon as he saw the Jews, worshiping this idol, he began to judge them. Now the Word of God becomes heavy and so he dropped the tablets. That is why the Jewish people say that Moses dropped the tablets. It's not that in his anger, he threw it at them, because he could not stand it in his anger. No, Moses dropped the tablets because they became so heavy to carry because he was carrying a judgment, and he cannot carry the two things. He cannot carry a judgment in his heart and at the same time, the Word of God. The Word of God comes to you and to me and tells us in the Gospel of St. John, "Do not judge by appearance, but judge with right judgment." But who can judge with right judgment? Only God! So the Word of God comes to you and to me and tells us: Because you are not God, you are not in a position to judge your brother and sister, because you don't know all the history of your brother and sister and because you do not know it, you are not in a position to judge. Some authors tell us, "If you know the secret history behind your enemy, there is enough pain in his or her life to dismantle your hostility."

In the wilderness, God comes to teach you and me. He gives us Jesus Christ. There are the temptations. We look at the way He was dialoging with the devil, not with reasoning. This is something that you and I, fall quite often into. When we are experiencing temptations, we begin to reason. Someone is pushing you to the limit, and you begin to reason. "I am not Jesus Christ, after all I am human, so it's natural that I get angry, it's natural that I talk back, it's natural that when they slap me on one cheek, I slap them back straight a way. It's natural." And we begin to reason.

But here, it's not a matter of reasoning. Reasoning does not help us to live in the wilderness. It is a matter of Faith. And so Jesus Christ, when he is attacked by the evil one, does not reason with him, but quickly presents the Word of God in front of him. He answers him constantly with the Scripture. Temptation for power - He answers him with Scripture. To accept the history that God gives us: Temptation with bread, "Man does not live by bread alone." The temptation to test God, "Do not put to the test the Lord your God." We read this morning, "How they tested Me, at Massah and Meriba, although they had seen My works, they tested Me." And we continue to test God in the wilderness! Just as the Jewish people had said, "Is the Lord with us or not?" "Is the Lord here or not?" That's what they said to Moses. "Is the Lord with us, or not?"

When I started this talk, I placed in front of you that important word, "Shiviti", "God's Presence". God is there, in our wilderness, helping us to go out of it, to experience the land of milk and honey. In the wilderness, we find John the Baptist, who was living the spirit of Elijah, the prophet. Scripture tells us that his food was honey, and it was also locusts. When there is a devastation, a disaster in the fields, the grass is gone but the locusts are there. So the locust seems to be the "remaining of stripping", of stripping away, "The remaining of the stripping".

When the prophet Ezekiel was challenged with this vision and he could see this book, written on both sides, and was told, "Eat the book". He said, "I ate it and it was sweet as honey in the mouth, bitter in the stomach".

It is the same with the Word of God brothers and sisters, it comes to you and to me in our wilderness and

presents in front of us these two things: the locusts and the honey. The locust is the result of our stripping; the honey is the Word of God. As soon as we begin to eat this Word, at first it seems to be okay, but as we journey, we begin to discover that I was very much better off before I joined the Secular Order. No trouble. Now that the elections are coming ... I never thought I was going to be asked to take this office. It was good to be there, just sitting there, as a spectator rather than an active participant. I know what they do to the President. I know what they do to the Mistress of Formation. I know what they do to the members of the Council. They dissect them. No way! April! Do you think that we planned it in April? No. But from all Eternity, the Lord knew that He has to prepare us for this job by passing us through our wilderness first, because otherwise we would not be in a situation to accept that responsibility.

We are presented with two bowls. In the Gospel there are two bowls. The bowl of Pilate or the bowl that Jesus Christ, our Teacher and Master used. The bowl of Pilate, the message is clear, "Wash your hands." "Have nothing to do with this job". The wife of Pilate came, telling him, "I had a bad dream." "I know what I am telling you." "This is an inspiration that I want to communicate to you." "Don't get involved." "Wash your hands." This is the catechesis of the world; wash your hands. Why should you live in the wilderness? The city offers you comfort and relaxation. After a day of work, you go home, you take a shower, you lift your feet up, you watch TV, take your beer, drink or eat, relax, take your coffee. Why should you go there again for the meetings? No! No! Perhaps I can be a member, but not in office, not in office! Yes. Continue to wash your hands like Pilate. Continue to wash your hands.

Then there is the other bowl that Jesus Christ used. It's the bowl of service. As you heard it said many times, Service is the rent we pay to God for the space that we occupy here on earth. Jesus Christ told us, "You call me Master and Teacher and you are right, yet here I am as one who serves." "Yet here I am as one who serves." To love: is to serve. When you love, you learn how to listen.

Listening is the first duty of love. When you are at home and you listen to the needs of your family, of your husband, of your children, of the people around you, you begin to serve them, minister to them. You take that bowl that Jesus Christ took and you begin to wash the feet of those people around you. To wash the feet, is not a matter of humility, brothers and sisters. Forget it! It's not a matter of humility. A person who serves, is a person who has courage, courage to die. He wants to live so much that he's ready to die, to live. He's ready to lose his life in order to find it. That is why Jesus Christ, laid aside his garments, laid aside his life. When he finished doing the service, do you think he stayed there with the garments aside? No. He took back his garments. His Life is given back to him. That is victory over death.

When you want to serve someone, ask the Secretariat or Teresa or the Presidents here, and ask me too, when you begin to be of service to others in a position to serve, they kill you. They help you to go up on top; this is for sure. They say, "You will be a good President." "You have these charisms." They push you up to be on top. As soon as you reach on top, then you look down to see where you stand, to take your bearings and what do you see? Congratulations, you made it to the top. Stand still so that they will get a good shot at you. And they will kill you. They will kill you. Criticisms. Stupid things. Stupid things.

In the wilderness brothers and sisters, you will not say, "This food is salty, I'm not going to eat it or it's not warm, it's cold, I'm not going to eat it." Whatever is brought to you in the wilderness, you'll swallow it. The wilderness helps us to live those words of St. Paul, "I have learned to be content in whatever situation I find myself therein". I have learned to be happy when I am naked or when I am clothed, when I am in famine or when I have abundance of food. ... The wilderness teaches us to be tough so that when we come to render service, we will not be discouraged with criticism that we hear here and there, and we do hear a lot.

Sometimes I wonder, what kind of spirituality we as Carmelites have. (I hope you take it in the right spirit that I am saying it to you as a challenge, not to criticize you - on the contrary, to make you conscious that it's about time that you begin to get a little maturity, spiritual maturity.) You don't get spiritual maturity in the city, in the town, in the village. You get it in the wilderness. And the Community helps each one of us to live in this wilderness. If you want to advance in Spirituality, without entering the wilderness, forget it. Forget it! Do a favor to yourself and do a favor to the rest of the Community. There are enough burdens, enough pain in the wilderness. We don't need other people to create more. What we need is to be able to stand together because the wilderness presents us with mountains and all of us know that the conquest of a mountain is not the job of

one person. We need to tie ourselves to each other before we begin to climb this mountain because one of us might fall. And if we are not tied to each other, we begin to lose people, lose people to the extent that you think you will be half way to the top of the mountain and you cannot climb more because there is not one left to support you.

Yes, we have to be more mature. Sometimes there are certain problems that we hear in the Secretariat or the Presidents, caused by members of the Community and we begin to wonder . Are we dealing with children here? Carmelites! Carmelites, what? They don 't even know what it is to be a Christian, much more a Carmelite. No one wants to serve. No one wants to die for the other person. Forgiveness is not in our terminology. Competition! Jealousy! Anger! I'm not saying for everyone or generalizing. I'm saying that there are these drops of poison that we have to be careful. I know I have to keep in mind what Gandhi said; "If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, it doesn't mean that the whole ocean is dirty." And that's what I believe. That if there are a few members that want to continue to live in the city, in the village, they don't want to venture in this wilderness, it doesn't mean that the whole community doesn't want to venture, on the contrary, thank God. I am very pleased that there are people who go beyond their sense of duty. Beyond! There are those who render service to the Community and to the Order and to the Church. Thank God for these people. But this should not be just a few.

Everyone should strive. That is the word that the Apostle uses, "Strive". That is the word that the prophet Elijah with his spirit infused in John the Baptist, his spirit infused in you and me as Carmelites. That is what he said, "I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh my God." "Jealous!" It's not zealous. It is jealousy. There is this jealousy. God has infused in him this attitude. Scripture says, "And your God whose name is Jealous." You have two references. One reference says, "Because I am a jealous God." The other reference in the Bible says, "And your God, whose name is Jealous." "Your God, whose name is Jealous." Elijah, who has come in touch with this God, this jealousy has been infused in him and so he is full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts.

And it is the same for the Christian and for the Carmelite, the wilderness helps us, brothers and sisters, to experience the power of this God, to discover that rock. St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians, Chapter 10, verse 4, he says, "That rock that gave the people water in the wilderness, that rock was Jesus Christ." But if you think that that is something beautiful, what he says after is even more beautiful. He says, "That rock followed them wherever they went." It's not a momentary experience. You say, that there was a moment once, or once in a blue moon I experienced this God. I experience Jesus Christ when I go to the meetings in the Community, once in a blue moon, but otherwise it's a wilderness. It's a wilderness. God is preparing you to enter the Promised Land. How is He going to prepare you? By leaving you in the city? No. No.

But if you have discovered this Rock, you have also discovered that this Rock is Jesus Christ, and He will follow you wherever you go. It is always there, "And lo, I am always with you even to the close of the age."

We become conscious of God's presence around us; presence in the poor; in the Community, people who are slow to understand what is being said; people who are new and we, with our big sanctity, we want to advance to the price, to the extent that it is damaging these people. Damaging these people. We begin to get angry with them because they did not understand. We lose our patience. Are these not temptations that the people of God experienced in the wilderness? What does the Bible tell us? "They began to lose their patience." In the wilderness, they began to lose their patience, the way we lose our patience in the Community with each other. But the more the Word of God enters there, the more we discover that "man does not live on bread alone but by every Word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord", the more the Community life will flourish. It will flourish.

We discover that God has the power to change our wilderness into a garden. In this sand, this hot sand, He will make this pool, this river that will flow through the wilderness. But we have to know how to wait upon the Lord. The wilderness is a testing time. Of course it's a testing time. The wilderness presents languages to you and to me. Fasting! Obedience! Almsgiving! To begin to Abstain! How many times have you heard the expression, "Travel Light", Travel Light! How is it that a truckload of things at your home is not enough but when you are going to travel, just a back pack keeps you going. How is it?

The wilderness helps us to strip ourselves, to learn the words of John the Baptist, not in an empty fashion, but in their essence, "I must decrease, He must increase." But the wilderness at first frightens us and that is why God has to lure us in. He has to attract us in towards it. And so the wilderness is presented during Lent, the Pope, notice his words, "During Lent, we prepare to relive the Paschal Mystery." Oh, that is different now. When you begin to put the Holy Land in front of you; that is different. "What sheds the light of hope upon the whole of our existence" the Paschal Mystery - two words, Paschal and Mystery. Mystery - Mysterium comes from Greek which means sacrament, a sign, a sign that people will be able to see. It's not an abstract idea. No, it's something concrete.

People need to see a Christian, a person who is ready to die in rendering service to other people. We need to see more people like Mother Theresa of Calcutta; people who God gives the energy to bend down and wash the feet of the poor. There are many examples brothers and sisters where we can meet the needs of the poor. There is intellectual poverty, poverty of character, people suffer from an inferiority complex, people who are very timid, and we, with our attitudes continue to crush them instead of helping them to come out of their shell. We continue to barricade their cave where they entered because society will not accept those people. It has no time for them. The wilderness helps us to realize, to think, to reflect on what we are doing. To reflect on our actions. It's a sign. The Christian needs to be a mystery, a sign of the Passover, victory over death.

Here we stand in front of a big Cross and that Cross is waiting for the Christian to go on it. "Follow Me." "Follow Me." Jesus Christ told us, "If you want to follow Me, you have to take up your cross daily." It was in the wilderness brothers and sister, it was in the wilderness, I repeat, and don't lose heart of this, don't lose this statement, "It was in the wilderness that the power of the Cross was discovered." The wilderness seems to be the symbol of a curse and Scripture says, "Cursed is he who hangs on a tree."

When the people traveled in the wilderness, what did they discover? They discovered what Ezekiel discovered. At first it was nice in the mouth but bitter in the stomach. When there was no water, people saw this mirage at a distance and they ran. There was water. They began to taste it. It was bitter. "It's bitter." Moses turns towards God and tells Him, "Is it not enough that You don't give them water? Is it not an injustice that these people are injured because of Your Word that they listened to and now they don't have water? Why on earth do You have to add insult to injury? Why do you have to give them bitter water?" And God said to Moses, "I'm going to show you a tree. Pluck it up. Put it in the water and that water will become drinkable." Moses picks up the tree, put it in the water and the water became sweet to be drunk. It is the same with you and with me, in our wilderness we learn how to catch hold of this tree so that the bitter water that the wilderness offers us will be changed into sweetness. We will learn in the wilderness there is a well waiting to be discovered by you and by me and once we discover this well in hugging the Cross, we will be able to change the bitterness of that water into sweet water. It helps us a lot, the wilderness, to see the importance and the power of the Cross, how it changes our bitter life into a life that is sweet, how it changes the position of Simon of Cyrene.

I went to see the movie of "The Passion" by Mel Gibson. Today you have to talk about it because it's the talk of everyone. If you don't mention this, they think that you are not living in the world. The scene of Simon of Cyrene was very beautiful, how this Simon did not want to take that Cross. There was a soldier who was my height, and Simon who was very tall and handsome and strong. Simon could have knocked the soldier down with a breath. There is a very beautiful meditation on this how at first Simon does not want to carry that Cross. It's not his Cross. Why should he carry the Cross of other people? Why should he listen to the words that St. Paul later on was to tell us, "Bear the burdens of one another and so fulfill the law of Christ." It's not his Cross. Why should he carry it? But he was forced to and cursing the moment. Cursing constantly. This is not my Cross. It was not a moment that I joined this Community. This is not the Community that I want to be with. I want to be in another Community. When I go there, because of my sister or my friend, they treat me like a queen. Oh yeh! They throw the bait and then they chop off your head. And that's what Simon begins to say. It was not a moment that I let my curiosity push me to come to see what's going on here. As soon as Simon enters there, there is this rebellion against God, against Jesus in front of him, against everyone. Then he begins to get tired of grumbling, tired. He begins to look at Jesus Christ. "Look at this guy, look at this guy. He has no blood in Him. Look at Him, they spit on Him, they throw stones at Him, He does not care. If they throw a stone at me, I'll tell them what they should do. That will be the end of them." In the meantime, without knowing, Simon is no longer concentrating on himself, he is being infected by the attitude of Jesus Christ - literally, literally infected.

We say, "Attitudes are contagious". Is your attitude worth catching? Is your attitude one of grumbling and of cursing everyone? What kind of attitude do you have?

Simon was catching the attitude of Jesus without even being aware of it. They arrive on Calvary. The soldier comes to Simon and says, "What do you want?" Simon replies, "The Cross, which Cross?". "The one you are carrying." replies the soldier. "No." "I'm going to take it home," says Simon. The soldier answers, "You are not going to take it home, that's the Cross we need to crucify this guy." Simon discovered that in this Cross, was his salvation. At first he was saying, "This is not my Cross." "I don't deserve this." He was cursing God, cursing Jesus, cursing everyone. But, once he set his eyes on Jesus Christ, he learned to walk when Jesus Christ walked, and to stop when Jesus Christ stopped. He was learning how to forget himself. St. Paul tells us in his letter to the Philippians, "Have this mind among yourselves which was in Christ Jesus, He did not look to his own interests but to the interest of others."