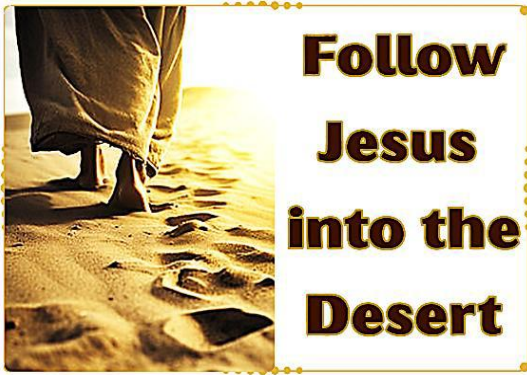




Preparing to Enter the Desert

Leader: Lent is a holy season, a time for reflection, repentance, and spiritual renewal. For many years, Lent has been an opportunity to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, journeying with Him into a spiritual desert, a place of isolation, testing, prayer, and of change or transformation. We are asked to welcome this season by opening our hearts, using the special strength, grace, and kindness that shape our lives and our family.

“Follow Jesus into the Desert” asks each person to purposely step away from distractions and enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ’s forty days in the wilderness. Let this mini retreat be our source of grace, courage, and new beginnings for each of us journeying together.

All: Lord, help us follow Jesus into the desert. We want to be closer to you. With a humble heart, we ask for Your Spirit to lead us, just as it led Jesus, into the quiet wilderness where Your voice echoes.

Help us to ignore all our noises, troubles, so we may hear Your call. Grant us courage to face our fears, to deal with our temptations, and trust to surrender all that is heavy on our soul. In the silence, teach us to listen past the noise from all around us, so that we may receive the grace You offer.

When we grow tired or unsure, remind us that we do not walk this desert alone. Your angels are with us, even though we cannot see them; Your love holds us up when we do not know what to say. Lead us, Lord, into the desert with Jesus, so we leave everything we do not need behind, because we will find everything in You. Amen.

Reader 1: Let’s begin by sitting in a quiet space and removing all distractions and silence all your devices. Consider lighting a candle, set out a religious icon, such as a crucifix, and have a Catholic Bible ready. With your mind and heart, take a moment to silently ask the Holy Spirit to accompany you on this journey and offer this prayer: “Come, Holy Spirit, lead me into the desert with Jesus. Open my heart to listen, to change, and to trust. Amen.”

Let’s Journey Into the Desert

Reader 2: The heart of this retreat reflects Jesus’ time in the desert. (Read Matthew 4:1-11 to everyone.) Now everyone, close your eyes and prepare to meditate. Think about the desert as a quiet place with challenges, and meeting with Jesus. While your eyes are closed, imagine walking beside Jesus in the desert, feeling Him beside you and hearing His invitation to trust and grow with Him.

Leader: Now open your eyes. At your table, take turns listening to each other and sharing your responses to:

- ◆ When did you feel like you were in a personal desert, a moment of challenge, loneliness, or needing help?
- ◆ What would you name your personal desert?
- ◆ How can you trust God in hard times?

Activity:

1. Provide each person with construction paper, something to write with, and appropriate scissors.
2. Have each person draw and cut out Jesus' footprints.
3. Write a note on each footprint you cutout, to Jesus, such as a thank you, help for something, a prayer for someone they love or someone in need.
4. Take them home and place them somewhere, so you can follow those footsteps, and walk with Jesus through Lent.

Emerging From the Desert

Reader 1: Lent is not supposed to end in the desert, because we are not meant to stay there. We follow Jesus into joy, hope, light and Easter. The desert is merely a door to Jesus.

May we always remember the lessons of the desert and walk with courage, patience, and joy as we following Jesus, who walked before us and walks with us always.

All: Lord Jesus, as we emerge from the desert, we thank You for walking with us into the quiet places of our hearts and the deserts in our lives. Give us the courage to trust You more deeply, the grace to hear Your gentle voice during the silence, and the strength to rise in Your love. May everything that we have experienced today grow into joy, trust, hope, and kindness as we journey onward. Let our hearts stay open to Your guidance and our footsteps strong in faith, knowing You are always with us.

Carry us from our desert into a new life, so we will share Your good news with all we encounter. Lord Jesus, strengthen us in our difficulties. Teach us to trust on Your Word and not our own. May our desert become a place of healing, and new beginnings for each of us. Amen