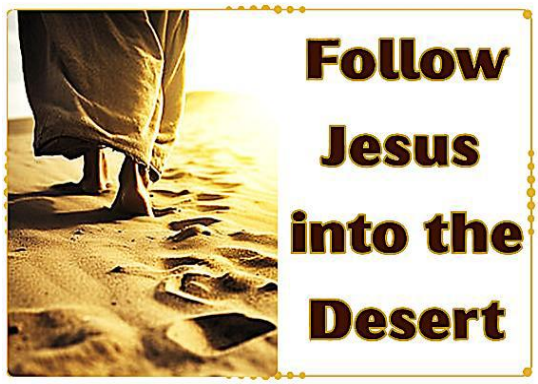

A Mini Lenten Retreat for CCW's
For Yourself or in a Group ▫ 45 – 50 minutes

Prepare to Enter the Desert

Leader: Lent stands as a sacred season, a time for reflection, repentance, and spiritual renewal. For centuries, Lent has been an opportunity for women of faith to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, journeying with Him into a spiritual "desert"—a place of solitude, testing, prayer, and transformation. As Catholic women, we are invited to embrace this season with open hearts, drawing on the unique strength, grace, and compassion that shape our lives and our communities.

"Follow Jesus into the Desert" calls each member of the Council of Catholic Women to intentionally step away from distractions and enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ's forty days in the wilderness. Let this mini retreat be a source of grace, courage, and new beginnings for each of us and for all Catholic women journeying together.

All: Lord, help me, as a member of the Council of Catholic Women, to follow Jesus into the desert. I stand at the threshold longing to draw closer to You. With a humble heart, I ask for Your Spirit to lead me, just as it led Jesus, into the quiet wilderness where Your voice resounds.

Help me to lay aside every distraction, every comfort that hinders me from hearing Your call. Grant me courage to face my fears, honesty to confront my temptations, and trust to surrender all that weighs upon my soul. In the silence and stillness, teach me to listen beyond the noise within and around me, so that I may receive the grace You offer.

When I grow weary or uncertain, remind me that I do not walk this desert alone. Your angels minister to me in unseen ways; Your love upholds me in moments of dryness. May I, and all Catholic women, emerge from this sacred season renewed, transformed, and ready to embrace the mission You have prepared for us.

Lead me, Lord, into the desert with Jesus, so that, in leaving all behind, I may find everything in You. Amen.

Why the Desert, of All Places?

Reader 1: The desert holds profound significance in scripture and spirituality. It is not a place of barrenness but a space where God reveals Himself, shapes His people, and calls us to trust. From the Exodus journey of Israel to Elijah's refuge beneath the broom tree, the desert becomes the stage for both struggle and encounter.

For Jesus, the desert was the crucible of preparation. After His baptism in the Jordan and before His public ministry, "the Spirit drove Him out into the desert" (Mark 1:12). There, He fasted for forty days and nights, facing hunger, temptation, and the whispering doubt of the enemy. In the desert, Jesus' identity as Son of God is revealed, and His mission is embraced with resolute trust in the Father.

Reader 2: For Catholic women, entering the desert is not to seek suffering for its own sake, but to awaken to God's presence and voice, stripped of the comforts and distractions that fill our lives. In the silence, we encounter our true selves—our fears, weaknesses, desires—and, most importantly, the God who calls us beloved daughters.

- Confronting our temptations honestly, as Jesus did.
- Choosing simplicity and fasting to free our hearts for what truly matters.
- Listening in silence to the gentle voice of the Father, who reassures, corrects, and sends us forth.

- Trusting that, like Jesus, we are not alone. Remembering that angels minister to us, and grace is present even in dryness.

Let's Journey Into the Desert

Leader: Begin by setting aside a quiet space by minimizing distractions and silence all your devices. You may wish to light a candle, set out a religious icon, such as a crucifix, and you'll need a Catholic Bible. Ask the Holy Spirit to accompany you 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."

The heart of this retreat reflects Jesus' time in the desert. Read Matthew 4:1-11, Mark 1:12-13, or Luke 4:1-13.

At Each Table: Reflect, Share & Journal —

- What words or images stand out from the reading you just heard?
- How does Jesus respond to temptation?
- What do you sense the Spirit inviting you to notice?
- Pause after reading. Let the silence speak. Record any insights in a journal.

Personal Journal Naming Your Deserts —

- Bring to mind the deserts in your own life: places of struggle, restlessness, or uncertainty. What would you name your desert?
- Quietly reflect upon where you feel spiritually dry, tempted, or alone.
- Name these honestly before God. Offer them up, trusting that your desert is not a punishment, but a place of encounter and transformation.
- Embrace Silence and set aside at least a few minutes for meditative silence. This is not a time for striving or doing, but simple being. If distractions arise, gently let them pass, returning to the prayerful awareness that you are in God's presence. You might use a short prayer, such as "Jesus, I trust in You," or "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening."

Reader 1: It is possible to fast from things other than food, such as social media or TV. If you are able, incorporate a fast during Lent. Let the hunger or longing that arises become a prayer, a bodily reminder of your spiritual hunger for God. Fasting is not about deprivation, but about making space for God's surprising provision.

Reflect: In what ways will you fast? What will you do during that time? What is your purpose for fasting? What makes you want to fast? What do you expect to learn?

Reader 2: We encounter temptations many times in our life. Reflect on the temptations Jesus faced: to turn stones to bread, to seek worldly power, to test God. Where are you tempted to rely on yourself, seek control, or lose faith? Pray and ask the Lord for the grace to respond as He did: with humility, surrender, and the Word of God.

Emerging From the Desert

Leader: Lent is not meant to end in the desert, but in Resurrection. After forty days, Jesus left the wilderness in the power of the Spirit, ready to proclaim the Good News. So, too, as Catholic women, we are sent forth—renewed, strengthened, and reminded that God draws us into the desert not to leave us there, but to bring us home changed and alive.

As this mini–Lenten Retreat concludes, please carry with you the lessons of the desert: deeper trust, greater silence, and a heart attuned to the gentle voice of the Lord. Wherever your Lenten journey leads, may you walk with courage, patience, and joy—following Jesus, who has gone before you and walks with you always.

All: Lord Jesus, as members of the Council of Catholic Women emerging from this time of reflection, we thank You for walking with us into the quiet places of our hearts and the deserts of our lives. Grant us the courage to trust You more deeply, the grace to hear Your gentle voice amid the silence, and the strength to rise renewed in Your love. May the lessons learned blossom into joy, hope, and compassion as we journey onward. Let our hearts remain open to Your guidance and our footsteps steady in faith, knowing You are always near. Carry us from the desert into new life, that we might share Your Good News with all we meet. Lord Jesus, strengthen us in our weaknesses. Teach us to rely on Your Word and not our own power. May this desert become a place of encounter, healing, and new beginnings for each of us. Amen.

Resources to Promote a Deeper Lenten Experience

- Journal your Lenten experiences
- Pray the Stations of the Cross, reflecting on perseverance.
- Utilize “Mary’s Way of the Cross” by Richard Furey, for Stations of the Cross (only 34 pages)
- Attend daily Mass or Adoration
- Receive Reconciliation for a fresh start
- Give time, resources, or kindness to those in need