

ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΣ ΠΛΗΡΩΜΑΤΟΣ
Apostolic Church of the Pleroma

*Delivered by Tau Phosphoros
to the Parish of St. Ambelain
on Sunday, March 5, 2017*

YEAR A - FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Today, my brethren, is the first Sunday in our Lenten Season. Lent is a period during which many of the faithful fast and practice other forms of asceticism, renouncing some part of their worldly regimen. Fasting and asceticism are not, of course, ends in and of themselves. They are to be looked upon as tools to help one reflect inward, and to focus on things eternal rather than impermanent things. It is the time, as we read about on Wednesday, to "enter into your private room and shut the door, and pray to your Father, who is in secret." This "private room" is the space of your own heart, a sacred space that is all too easily ignored when we are focused on the distractions of the outside world.

In today's Gospel reading, we read of Jesus' temptations in the desert which he endured for a span of forty days. Within the Scriptures, the number forty is often related to a period of trial, of testing, which of course also implies then a period of purification, which is also related to the notion of maturing and growth. Noah and his family were shut up in the ark for forty days. Moses and his people wandered the desert for forty years. And the developing human is in the womb for forty weeks. But we do see a distinct difference or a dichotomy between two contrasting manifestations of the number forty. On the one hand, we have the ark and the womb. These are both enclosures that are meant to protect. Just as Noah had prepared the ark to be a self-contained habitat for himself and his family during the course of the deluge, so is the womb a contained system for the growing child, protective and nourishing.

On the other hand, there is the desert that Moses and his people endured for 40 years and the desert in which Jesus fasted and experienced his trials for 40 days. The desert is the complete opposite of the ark or the womb. It is a vast, wide-open, barren wasteland. It is a place of privation and exposure as opposed to one of nourishment and protection. But yet they are connected by this mysterious number forty.

This is because they are opposite ends of the same thing. That is, they all do in fact relate to a period of trial and hardship. In the case of Moses and Jesus, they are plunged into the very heart of trials and tribulation; whereas, in the case of Noah and the growing child, it is their environment that is undergoing the greatest difficulties. For the child, the environment is the mother, who experiences all of the pains and difficulties of pregnancy and childbirth. For Noah it is the mother earth that is experiencing the upheaval. But each also exists within the other to a degree. That is, the child in the womb and Noah in his ark, though protected from the elements, have their own trials to overcome. And Jesus and Moses in the desert, and ourselves during the 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday, have recourse to the protection of the Father, if only we will enter that protective and nurturing space of the heart.