



## LENT: OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY!

The deathbed words or advice of well-known people run the gamut from inspiring to darkly humorous. The dramatist Oscar Wilde remarked, "Either that wallpaper goes, or I do." King David told his son Solomon, "Be strong, be courageous, and keep the charge of the Lord your God." Today's first reading is a very small part of the final words of Moses to the Israelite people. It takes up virtually the entire book of Deuteronomy!

The structure and content of this passage are well adapted to our position in the liturgical year and in our own lives.

**Today's passage from Deuteronomy** - The physical setting. The Israelites are camped on the bank of the Jordan, about to cross and enter the promised land. Moses will not enter the promised land; he wants to prepare the people for the dangers that lie ahead. The greatest danger is spiritual: temptation to fall away from faithfulness to the covenant. Moses follows two principal threads: recounting their journey as a people, the history of God's gracious kindness to them, setting and reviewing the prescriptions they are to live by in obedience and gratitude. Today's passage is a micro version of those two threads: prescriptions for a festival of first fruits, a festival of gratitude; as they make their offering, they are to recite a micro history, personalizing the Israelite experience to themselves; this will be one of many regularly occurring liturgical reminders.

**Our annual experience of Lent, culminating in the Triduum, serves a similar experience.** The past: where we came from. The Israelites were in bondage in Egypt; we were in the bondage of sin. The first fruits we have to offer are: a restored righteousness; a renewed appreciation of God's graciousness; a renewed dedication to follow the commandments of Jesus. The purpose of our Lenten penance: not to earn forgiveness, nor to become a spiritual giant, but to right the wrongs we've done (hence the recent emphasis to match the penance with our sins). At Easter we too will make merry over all the good things the Lord our God has given us (see Dt 26:11).

**Applying all this personally.** Like the Israelites, each of us is about to enter a new land. "Today is the first day of the rest of your life." The stages of bondage, wandering, and entry to new life repeat in different ways as we journey; reflecting on our personal spiritual journey. We owe it to God, to ourselves, and to our faith community to maintain our spiritual health. Consider: In what ways was I in bondage to sin and selfishness? In what ways am I still? How have I wandered confused, uncertain, or even lost? Do I maintain faith in God's grace even in spiritually dark times? What liberation and source of joy would I like to experience during the Easter season?

Let us prepare ourselves to offer and to receive our savior, whose sacrifice has redeemed us from bondage and who will guide us through the terrain ahead.



*Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit and was tempted....Luke 4:1-13*