

## God is Present – Lent 1

God is present. Yes, indeed, we agree. God is always, always present. Yet is our biggest temptation in this season of Lent, or any time, the temptation to fall into the dark hole where we believe God is not present? In our bleakest times and we all have them, it is very easy to lose the thread of goodness and that is a temptation. In today's Gospel, on the heels of a beautiful baptism where the curtains of heaven are torn apart, where the Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove, where he is declared the beloved son in whom God is well pleased, on the heels of that! the Spirit then drives Jesus out into the wilderness. No choice – he is driven out to the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights among the wild beasts. Nasty! Threatening! But...the angels waited on him. In other words...God, in the persons of the angels was present...ministering to Jesus...tending him. That I find tremendously comforting. God was there. God was actively there.

I came across a couple of images that show the angels ministering to our Lord. One by James Tissot who died in 1902



Jesus is 'spent', exhausted in the wildness. But he is surrounded by at least 30 spirits (I counted), each with a little spirit flame lit on its head. Can't you just imagine them whispering and soothing, caressing him with their voices??

Next is a close up – just in case you missed it –

It is their hands they are extending – reaching out lovingly to Jesus to restore him, to literally give him a hand. Beautiful image.



Here is another image

This is by J. Kirk Richards, an American who was born in 1975



. This imagines Jesus being borne up by angels on their wings. So the main point of today's little talk is that we can be assured that God is present always...especially when we are most tempted to deny it. We all travel the desert, don't we? We all have hard times when we are discouraged. We have grave health issues, chronically dysfunctional relationships which can erupt. We are in the midst of a world pandemic which has altered and restricted our lives in unexpected ways and makes us fearful.

But still, God is with us...God has promised us his steadfast love right from Genesis. God reaches out...like those angels' arms...that is why Jesus came...to be with us. Can we imagine those angels arms and hands reaching out to us when we are in need and to others?

This is the beginning of our Lenten journey. Let us notice how God is with us and make that our Lenten offering. We end with a prayer from Pope Francis:

Let us always pray for everything and for everyone, even for our enemies ....

Let us pray for our dear ones, but also for those we do not know .... Let us pray above all for unhappy people, for those who weep in solitude and give up hope that there might still be someone who loves them .... The Lord is — let us not forget — the Lord of compassion, of nearness, of tenderness: three words never to be

forgotten. Because this is the Lord's style: compassion, nearness, tenderness.' ~  
Francis I