

## I WILL LEAD YOU INTO THE DESERT

— MK 1:12-15

The devil comes to tempt you, Jesus,  
when you are weak and vulnerable.  
And yet the mysterious thing is that the Spirit  
has deliberately led you into this place.  
Your body is frail from fasting  
and your mind is constrained by solitude;  
your affections too are as it were stilled  
by the discipline of prolonged silence,  
and yet, on the other hand,  
they are but honed to thirst more deeply  
for all the good things of this earth.

Through your time in the desert, Jesus,  
you are living intensely in that truth  
from which, fallen as we are, we tend to flee.  
We prefer to live on the periphery,  
occupied with so many secondary, passing things,  
rather than to descend into the inner truth  
of the heart as it abides before you, naked,  
in an ineffable silence and solitude  
which none can access but you  
and this unique human heart, alone.

But why do you go here, Jesus?  
Is it to prune away your concrete humanity,  
to become some kind of angelic spirit  
in a superhuman elevation and flight from reality?  
No, it is rather quite the opposite:  
you descend lovingly into the poverty  
and the dependency of our human life,  
which you have espoused lovingly as your own.  
In the very body-spirit composite  
that constitutes each of us, Jesus, you abide,  
and thus you heal, redeem, and sanctify it from within.

You experience our weakness, our pains,  
our human limitations, struggles, and fears—  
and yet you do so from this inner place,  
from the sanctuary of the heart in its solitude,  
or, better, in its trust-filled surrender to the Father,  
through which it abides in unceasing relationship with  
him,  
in the shelter of his own loving and caring embrace.

The evil spirit tempts you, however, in this weakness,  
in the frailty of mind and heart due to fasting,  
in the thirst for tangible relationship due to solitude,  
in the grasping desire for something audible  
and clearly, palpably real due to silence.  
He attacks you in your weakness and vulnerability.

And yet the amazing thing is that you overcome him,  
not through throwing up walls to protect your heart  
(though your heart is certainly protected by the Father's  
love)  
but by taking refuge precisely in your vulnerability  
and refusing to seek compensation for it from outside.

This physical and emotional frailty, Jesus,  
seeks its fulfillment and its strength  
in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God,  
and is sustained by the Father's mysterious embrace,  
holding you in your poverty and dependency.  
This thirst for interpersonal communion  
seeks its fulfillment in the solitary intimacy of the Father,  
and, yes, in the openness of self-giving and acceptance  
before each and every person, children of God,  
that blossoms fully only from this deep interior place.  
This thirst for a real and concrete contact  
with the truth and beauty of reality  
is sought and found, not in the senses' titillation,  
but as a gift, a word, born from the womb of silence.

In this way, my Jesus, you take our weakness as your own  
and, through your filial surrender to the Father  
in the heart of the desert's struggle and temptation,  
you redeem our own heart's solitude from within.  
Then we can truly hear you saying, through the Spirit,  
"I will lead you into the desert, my beloved,  
and there I will speak to your heart.  
I will espouse you to myself forever,  
in righteousness and justice, in steadfast love and mercy,  
and you shall know, intimately, that I am your God."

So let us not be afraid of this inner solitude,  
of this vulnerability in the depths of our heart,  
nor of that radical surrender, in this place,  
to your Love which is both infinitely beyond us  
and yet intimately close, pressing upon us from every side  
and welling up, already, deep within our heart.

In the heart of this mysterious desert, Jesus,  
through entering into the reality of childhood,  
into the nuptial embrace of your own Love,  
we will find the fulfillment of our desires,  
the rest that our restless heart constantly seeks.  
The springs of living water will well up,  
unceasingly, within us—and flow forth,  
irrigating the aridity of our whole being,  
and, indeed, pouring out to touch, heal,  
and draw other hearts to this place as well.