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Pope: Lent should be time of grace, defeating temptation

Cindy Wooden Catholic News Service | Feb. 22, 2012

VATICAN CITY -- The 40 days of Lent are a time of spiritual renewal in preparation for Easter, but they also are a time to recognize that evil is at work in the world and even the Catholic Church faces temptations, Pope Benedict XVI said.

The pope explained the meaning of Lent during his weekly general audience on Ash Wednesday.

Like the people of Israel during their 40-year exodus and like Jesus during his 40 days in the desert, the Catholic Church and its members experience the grace of God, but also are besieged by evil around them and are tempted by power and selfishness, the pope said.

Jesus, before beginning his public ministry, withdrew to the desert for 40 days. Fasting, "he nourished himself on the word of God, which he used as a weapon to defeat the devil," the pope said.

Pope Benedict said experience of God's grace and of temptation is not unique to modern Catholics or to the church.

During their 40 years in the desert, the people of Israel were guided by God, fed with manna and given water from a rock, but they also were tired, complaining and tempted to return to idol worship, the pope said. And, spending 40 days in the desert before beginning his public ministry, Jesus experienced the closeness of God, but also faced the devil's temptations of "power, success and dominion."

"This ambivalent situation also describes the condition of the church journeying through the desert of the world and history. In this desert, we believers certainly have the opportunity of having a profound experience of God, who strengthens our spirit, confirms our faith, nourishes our hope and animates our charity," the pope said.

However, he said, "the desert is also the negative aspect of the reality that surrounds us: the aridity, the poverty of words and values, the secularism and materialism" that attempt to convince people that God does not exist.

Still, "the desert time can be transformed into a time of grace" because God's love is more powerful than the temptations of the world, the pope said.

At the end of the audience, Pope Benedict met with Msgr. Keith Newton, head of the Personal Ordinariate of Our Lady of Walsingham. Members of the ordinariate, established in January 2011 for the pastoral care of former Anglicans in England and Wales, were making a pilgrimage to the Vatican to thank the pope.

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