

First Sunday of Lent Year B 2009 – Mark 1:12-15

1. I don't know about you, but I, at least was not surprised.
2. You know, last Sunday night, when after all the awards in such exciting categories as best sound production in a foreign film and the like,
3. The award for best picture at the Oscars went to *Slumdog Millionaire*.
4. I don't usually like romances,
5. And yet by the time this story
 - a. About a boy named Jamal
 - b. From the slums of Mumbai, India
 - c. who competes in their equivalent of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire",
 - i. is over
 - d. I was completely undone – and so evidently was just about everyone else.
6. But not everyone – for when in a feeble attempt to appear "multicultural"
 - a. I told two Indian friends I had seen *Slumdog Millionaire*,
 - b. they groaned, "OH not that movie again! It was horrible!"
7. Their reason for rejecting the movie had nothing to do with plot or acting.
 - a. Just simply because, as far as they were concerned,
 - b. it made India look like a violent, terrible wasteland,
 - c. filled with suffering, danger and evil.
8. Now of course my two friends live in Beverly Hills, and work for the Hilton Hotel Company.
 - a. The slums of Mumbai are as alien to them as they would be to us;
 - i. but that is just the point;
 - b. It is horrifying to face the fact that in the heart of a city they know, in a land they love, there is such a wasteland of suffering, danger and evil.
 - c. It is so much easier to ignore it, or to deny its importance.
9. That is until the suffering, evil and danger rudely break in upon our denial.
 - a. It is bad enough when the suffering is a world away.
 - i. When we see images of starving children
 - ii. Or Palestinian families devastated by Israeli rockets,
 1. We can rationalize, pity, or just change the channel.
10. But nowadays that suffering is hitting closer to home;
11. In ways only a few years ago we could scarcely have imagined.
 - a. We see it in the faces of mothers
 - i. now lining up at St. Teresa's food pantry, some for the first time.
 - b. We see it in the faces of men, some dressed in \$1000 suits, who only a few years before had landed their dream jobs in banking and finance,
 - i. going to job fairs, desperate for work.
 - c. We see it the faces of tens of thousands of American families
 - i. Losing their savings and their homes.
 - d. We see it in other people's lives; and increasingly in our own.
12. We are forced to face the fact that here in our nation, in our city, in our families and in our lives
 - a. There exists a wasteland filled with suffering, danger and evil.
13. And one of the most painful things about that wasteland is that,

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- a. Though many people may be suffering in it; each of us suffers alone.
14. But maybe not quite.
15. Jesus is there too.
16. For in this morning's Gospel Jesus is driven out in to the wasteland;
 - a. into the desert.
 - b. He is tempted thereby the chief tempter himself,
 - c. And surrounded by wild beasts.
17. Both Matthew and Luke turn this story into a morality play
 - a. about faith and obedience to God alone.
18. But not Mark;
 - a. For Mark the whole point was that Jesus knew what it was to suffer,
 - b. To be tempted, to be terrified,
 - c. Not by loss of work or livelihood but of life itself.
 - d. He knew what it was like to be one of us; because he was.
19. It is just that Jesus knew something that all too often we forget;
 - a. That no matter how alone he felt; he would never be alone.
20. Because in the verses immediately before this morning's Gospel,
 - a. Jesus was baptized by John in the river Jordan.
 - b. In Mark, that baptism functions like a promise
 - c. Rooted at the start of Jesus' public life
 - d. That no matter what happens next,
 - e. It happens to someone who is God's beloved child.
 - i. God chose Jesus and God's Spirit would be with him,
 1. testing him not so that he would fail,
 2. but so that he would win;
 - ii. God's angels would accompany him, and
 - iii. God would never abandon him.
21. When we understand that about Jesus' baptism, and his time in the desert,
 - a. We understand something about our baptism as well.
22. Ever wonder why we baptize children?
23. Why we don't wait until they are old enough to decide for themselves?
 - a. Well while there are certainly good reasons for waiting,
 - b. We Catholics, indeed most Christians baptize babies
 - c. Because we believe Baptism is what Mark believed it to be;
 - d. God promise, rooted at the start of our lives,
 - e. That God long before we can choose God, God chooses us
 - f. And that no matter how bleak the desert and wasted the land,
 - g. What happens to us happens to someone who is God's beloved child.
 - h. And God will never abandon us.
24. Anyone who has seen *Slumdog Millionaire* will admit that the wasteland there is pretty bleak;
 - a. At one point in the movie Jamal speaks about the death of his mother,
 - i. Who was murdered when the Hindu faithful of the slums
 - ii. Attacked the Muslim residents there.

First Sunday of Lent Year B 2009 – Mark 1:12-15

- b. He says he knows that if it were not for Allah Rahman,
 - i. that is God the compassionate one,
 - ii. he would still have a mother.
 - c. In short, he blames God for her death
 - i. which orphaned him and his brother
 - ii. and left them to fight for themselves
 - iii. alone amongst the wild beasts of India.
25. And if the message of the movie were only ;
- a. that we are left to struggle and suffer alone,
 - b. and that if we are very lucky we might triumph,
 - c. well then *Slumdog Millionaire* might have resonated with how so many of us feel these days. But it probably would not have won so many awards.
26. But the message of the movie is something far deeper; a message hinted at,
- a. At very start of the movie, when we are asked a question,
 - b. Just like on the show “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?”
 - i. Why does Jamal know the answers to these questions?
 - 1. We are given four choices.
 - ii. Then the movie begins, and we forget about the question.
 - iii. And the choices.
 - c. Until the very last scene, when down at the bottom of the screen, it says, the Answer was (d) It is written.
 - i. In other words, things happened to Jamal the way they did for a reason,
 - ii. That his life was by definition the figuring out of that reason
 - iii. And that although the desert was bleak and his life was filled with suffering, he was not alone; he was never alone.
27. Baptism is our answer (d)
- a. It is our promise, rooted in our lives that, no matter how bleak the desert or wasted the land, whatever happens to us happens to God’s beloved Child, and God will never abandon us.
 - b. That realization might not change the loss of a job;
 - c. The disappearance of our savings and our investments
 - d. It might not make a sick parent well,
 - e. or bring someone back from the dead.
 - f. But it does is change the way we see everything;
 - g. and in that it opens our eyes and our hearts to new possibilities and beginnings that otherwise our sadness and fear would have blinded us to.
 - h. Because we are not alone. We are never alone.