

Lent 1  
2.22.26

On June 4<sup>th</sup> this past year, Cali Booth became the youngest person to hike the entire length of the Florida National Scenic Trail. The Trail extends from the Panhandle to the Everglades. All told, she and her father, Jaime, walked more than 1100 miles. Cali is just 13 years old.

She and her father hiked into swamps and onto white sandy dunes as they made their trek. I'm sure they saw their fair share of snakes and alligators. They faced extreme heat and humidity. Cali said that one of the toughest stretches of the hike came when she and her dad walked along a 23 mile stretch of highway for several hours. They started at 1:30 in the morning and hiked until 10:30 am. They did so to avoid the heat of the day and left early enough to avoid the heaviest traffic that usually passes on that highway at 75 mph or more. That part of the trip points out there are still parts of the Florida Trail which are interrupted by roads and development. No doubt, Cali will probably become a lifelong advocate with Florida Legislators to completely link the trail and preserve it so that generations to come will enjoy it as she and her dad did.

Her most memorable day was the last one. About a mile from the northern terminus of her hike, Cali's dad stopped and told her, "I am so impressed with you, and I want you to know how proud of you I am.... You are the proof that when you put your mind to it, anybody can do hard things" (TBTs, 2/9/26). As she reflected on her hike, she offered these words, "you may not think you can do something amazing – and over time, it might feel stressful or...scary – but at the end, it feels really amazing

to be able to get something done like that.... No matter what it is, when you get it done, you feel good about yourself and you feel stronger in the end” (TBTs, 2/9/26).

When I read this account of Cali’s trek, I thought of how it parallels our Lenten journey. Today is the First Sunday of Lent. We are just five days into this long, desert hike toward Easter. The gospel for this Sunday is always taken from one of the Synoptic accounts about Jesus spending forty days in the desert before he begins his ministry on earth. During his time in the desert, I am sure that Jesus was overwhelmed with how challenging that experience was. I am sure he wanted to give up. And he faced temptations, in many of the same ways that we are tempted to give in and give up while making our own journey during the forty days of Lent. But as Cali experienced and as Jesus witnessed, the journey is worth it. In the end we are spiritually stronger, more resilient, and certainly ready to live out more fully the Christian way of life.

While in the desert, Jesus was tempted to sin in three distinct ways. Having fasted from food and water during that time, the devil tempted Jesus to turn stones into bread. While this temptation deals with Jesus fasting from food, it has much broader implications. The devil was telling Jesus that satisfaction would come from eating his fill and perhaps from possessions in general. We are tempted in similar ways. We are lured by the temptation that large amounts of money, positions of authority, certain relationships, or material goods will completely satisfy us. Jesus’ response is our reason for resisting that temptation. Despite what we have or don’t have, true fulfillment comes first from the union we share with God.

With the second temptation, Jesus is asked to test God the Father. If he throws himself off the top of the Temple, the evil one says the Father will send his angels to save him. Do we give into this same temptation? We might say, “if you heal me, help me to get this job or a passing grade, if you get me out of this difficulty, then I will believe in you and follow you. But at times that request isn’t answered as we had hoped. In response we doubt, we give up praying, perhaps we even curse God for his apparent lack of assistance. Again, Jesus reminds us to trust in the Father, not for what we get. Rather, we trust him for what he helps us to become, even when we don’t receive that healing, that job or grade, or are still stuck in that jam. God is with us – in good times and in bad.

The third temptation describes Jesus being tempted to worship the devil. The evil one said he would grant everything to him if Jesus just gave himself over to the devil’s ways and to sin. How often do we compromise our principles in order to get some material good or a position of power? Do we use what we have - wealth, power, position - to build up ourselves or do we use what we have to build up the Body of Christ?

Resisting temptations, completely trusting in God, and using what we have to build up Christ’s Body is what makes us stronger, happier, and holier. When we do these things, then we can truly be called Christ’s disciples.

Our hiker, Cali, became stronger and more confident the longer and more faithful she was to walking the Florida Trail. She will forever be different in the best possible sense, because of how

she embraced and gave herself to walking those 1100 miles. We are even more blessed the more faithful and committed we are to walking the path laid out for us throughout the Season of Lent. We become spiritually stronger and resilient, we become more generous and more aware of those in need, when we completely and fully walk the walk of faith during this holy season.

At the end of her journey, Cali's father told her how proud he was of the effort and grit she showed in walking the Florida Trail. How much prouder is God the Father of us when we recommit and remain faithful to our Lenten journey to turn away from sin and as we are faithful to the Gospel. How over-the-moon is God with us as we engage more fervently and earnestly in daily prayer, as we fast from sinful and self-indulgent behavior, and as we share what we have with our sisters and brothers who are struggling?

Let us keep walking the walk of faith during this holy time. May we know that God helps us when we are weary and he raises up our spirits when we are frustrated with the journey or frustrated with our perceived lack of results when walking in his footsteps. This Lenten season and our fidelity to its practices (like more intense prayer, more earnest fasting, and more generous almsgiving) is what makes us more like Christ and enables us to share in his divine life in this world and the world to come. Just keep putting one **faith**-foot in front of the other and keep walking the walk of faith. As we do so, God proclaims how proud he is of us and reminds us that together, we can do anything!

Amen? Amen!