May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

At some point we all leave home. It is something we do throughout our lives. Over and over we leave home. We’ve all done it. We leave home physically, emotionally and spiritually. We leave those places that are familiar, comfortable, predictable. Sometimes we can’t wait to leave. We’re ready to go. Other times we would rather not leave. Sometimes we choose to leave. Other times the circumstances of life push us out the door. Regardless of how or why it happens, leaving home is a part of life. It happens in lots of different ways and times.

For children it might be the first day of school or going to summer camp. Young adults move out of their parent’s home to start college or go to work. The significant changes of life are forms of leaving home: a marriage, a divorce, the birth of a child, the death of a loved one. New employment or the loss of employment are about leaving home. Moving to a new town, retirement, the loss of health all involve leaving home. The major decisions that bring us to the crossroads of life are also about leaving home.

Leaving home is not, however, simply about the circumstances of life. It is the way of God’s people. Adam and Eve left the garden. Noah left his dry land home. God told Abram (Gn. 12:1), “*Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you*”. Jacob ran away from home fearing for his life. Moses and the Israelites left their homes in Egypt. And in today’s gospel Jesus is leaving home.

As Mark tells it, “*Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee*” to the Jordan River. He left his home and now stands with John in the Jordan, the border between home and the wilderness. There he is baptized. The heavens are torn apart, the Spirit like a dove descends, and a voice declares, “*You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased*.”From there “*the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness*.” Baptism may happen in the river but the baptismal life begins in the wilderness.

That’s what this holy season of Lent is about. It is no coincident that on Ash Wednesday we are usually marked with the ashes of remembrance, the dust of our creation, and today the gospel takes us to the wilderness. The two cannot be separated. Wednesday’s ashes lead us to wilderness soil. Lent is about leaving home… and leaving home in Lent and life, always takes us to the wilderness.

In the wilderness we come face to face with the reality of our lives; things done and left undone, our fears, our hopes and dreams, our sorrows and losses, as well as the unknown. These facts of our life are the source of our temptations.

We leave home and experience wilderness temptations to discover that our most authentic identity is: as a beloved child of God and our only real home is with God.

The wilderness is new territory for us. In the wilderness the old structures, the ones we left behind, no longer contain, support, or define our life. It is the way home, the way to God. We go to the wilderness with the knowledge and confidence that Christ has gone before us. Leaving home is not so much a loss for us, but an opportunity for God. In the wilderness our illusions of self-sufficiency become surrender to God, our helplessness opens us to God’s grace, and our guilt is overcome by God’s compassion. That’s what happens when you leave home.

We can never escape or avoid the wilderness. Like Jesus, we must go through it. We must face the temptations of Satan and be with the wild beasts. Yet we never go alone. The angels that ministered to Jesus will be there for us. “Remember who you are,” is their message. “You are a beloved son of God. You are a beloved daughter of God. You are one with whom he is well pleased.” Over and over they tell us. They remind us. They encourage us.

With each remembrance of who we are the demons are banished. With each remembrance of who we are we overcome Satan’s temptations. With each remembrance of who we are we take another step toward God. That is the way through the wildernesses of life. Remembrance after remembrance. Step after step. “I am a beloved child of God. With me he is well pleased.” Let that become our wilderness prayer. Let those words fill our minds, cross our lips, and occupy our hearts. The truth of those words is the way home. Amen.