

# Buen Camino

Newsletter of Fr. Michael Fish, OSB, CAM

## Lent is all about the desert

A friend sent me a little novel, translated from the Spanish, entitled *The Friend of the Desert*. The author, Pablo d'Ors, turns out to be a Spanish priest. The novel tells the story of a man living in a city, who becomes infatuated with the desert. He hangs photos of the desert in his room and spends hours simply looking at and contemplating them.

He discovers a group, "Friends of the Desert," and accompanies them on expedition to the Sahara. It turns out to be a mixed experience, colored by strange interactions among the group. Returning home, the romanticism is shattered, but the desert photos continue to mesmerize him. He goes again to the Sahara, this time a much more personal, intimate encounter with the desert occurs causing a *desertification* of his heart and life. The desert systematically elbows its way into him, seducing and possessing him.

Personally, I have always loved the desert more than any other terrain – the Karoo, Sahara, the deserts of Namibia, the Sinai Peninsula, Death Valley – have always attracted me. That's why I'm slow to recommend the novel, it's probably more of personal appeal.

Lent, which begins this month, is all about desert – the 40 days of Jesus in the desert, and the 40-year desert Camino of the people of Israel, show how wilderness both bruised and enlightened Jesus and Israel.

The question which arises each year at this time is what should I do for Lent? I feel I have been in Lent and the desert since March 2020. So this year, I am not giving up anything or taking on anything. Rather, like the fellow in the novel, I am going to spend time each day looking at and contemplating the deserts in my life – Covid and others. Hopefully, in so doing, a *desertification* will also occur in me, a stripping and simplification, an expansion and new attention to the little things of life.

Then, perhaps, after 40 days, I'll experience something similar to 30 years ago when my aunt and I traveled to the desert, after an unusual rainy season, to find it transformed into a carpet of flowers as far as the eye could see. What a metaphor for Resurrection.

I have asked Laura, who maintains the Hermit Fish website, to upload some "Desert File" pictures each week during Lent: <https://hermitfish.com/desert-file>. See if you find a few that call to you and join me this Lent in becoming "a friend of the desert."

Blessings, .

*Michael*

"Those weeks, in front of the desolate landscapes of my photographs, I experienced a solitude unknown to me..."

As the process of desertification advances at a pace of two thousand square kilometers per year – according to what I read – that same process advanced, and at the same pace, across the landscape of my soul, which emptied itself day after day until becoming unrecognizable. Stones, mountains, valleys... everything was subjected in my heart, as in the desert, to a relentless erosion...

The extraordinary thing about this matter was... that devastation, didn't matter to me. Rather I desired it as I have desired few things in life; I longed for the poverty and necessary nakedness to which the desert seemed to invite me...

When you love the desert, you have the impression that you are approaching both your origin and your destination."

Pablo d'Ors

Excerpted from *THE FRIEND OF THE DESERT*

## Michael news

Michael is well and has begun writing his inaugural online video retreat, details of which are still pending.

Thanks to those who have reached out with ideas, advice and encouragement. We will keep you posted as to the *what* and *when* of this first online retreat effort.

## "Compassion" CDs are a "Go"

We are going ahead with the CD sets for Michael's *Compassion* retreat. Thanks to all who ordered. We're producing some additional copies, so if you'd still like to order, you can receive your CDs in time for Holy Week if you order by March 18th.

Given the response to *Compassion*, we are considering offering additional retreats on CD in the future.

All 13 of Michael's retreats are available as downloads. Each is a full retreat, consisting of 5 talks, totaling roughly 5 hours. Visit:

<https://hermitfish.com/audio-retreats>

## Hermitage remains open

New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur is open in spite of the Hwy 1 collapse a few miles north. The Hermitage remains accessible from the south. Prayers and support appreciated. Visit: <https://www.contemplation.com/>

## Grateful for your support

Michael thanks everyone for their continued prayers, good wishes and support. Donations to Hermit Fish, his 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization are fully tax deductible. Gifts of any size are greatly appreciated. FID: 82-2489475

Visit: <https://www.hermitfish.com/donate>

Creative and logistical support for Michael, his *Buen Camino* newsletter and HermitFish.com website are provided by Enigma | LA, [enigmala.com](http://enigmala.com)