

## [23] First Sunday of Lent

**Readings:** *Genesis 9:8-15 / Psalm 25 / 1 Peter 3:18-22 / Mark 1:12-15*

Noah plays the part of a new Adam. Just as in the creation story, Adam is given charge over creation and names every living thing; Noah preserves the animals from destruction and he and his family will make a new beginning. The spirit of God hovers over the waters of creation and he breathes life into all living beings. Just as life comes from the waters, so too does death. The covenant that God establishes with Noah includes the promise that God will never again wipe out the world through a flood. This pattern is revisited with Christ and the new covenant: we die with Christ in the waters of baptism so that we might live or rise with him. The rainbow is left as a sign of God's covenant with Noah. The sign of the cross will be the mark or lasting sacramental of Christ's saving covenant. Baptism makes us adopted sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters to Christ, heirs of the kingdom and members of the Church. The Church is often reckoned as or compared to the Ark of Noah. Salvation is found in Christ and in his Church. As pilgrims who must sail through the dangerous storms of this world, our Lord guides and protects us as our captain in his boat or ship. Our rations are signified by the Eucharist, food taken from the Promised Shore. The story of Noah, like the story of salvation in Christ is both about judgment and mercy. Even if many are lost, some will be saved. Those who listen to the Lord will be spared. Those who turn away will face his terrible justice.

The psalm asserts, "Your ways, O Lord, are truth and love to those who keep your covenant." Those who claim God will in turn be claimed by him. It is as simple as that. Covenants are contracts but also much more. Jewish covenants were made in blood. An animal would be slain and blood sprinkled. It was understood that if one broke a covenant, a promise would become a curse. Literally placing one's life and that of the family on the line, one implored that if this covenant was broken then "let happen to me" what was suffered by this sacrificed lamb or goat or bull. Jesus would be the Lamb of God who "lays down his life" for sinners.

Despite our infidelity, Jesus is faithful. He takes upon himself the sins of the world. He dies that we might live. The psalm asserts that "truth" comes with the covenant. God reveals himself and establishes a relationship with us. Jesus is the revelation of the Father, showing us the face of God. The psalm also states that the covenant expresses love. It is love that calls us into existence. It is for love that God saves a remnant in the days of Noah. It is love that is nailed to a tree and that proves stronger than the grave.

The second reading from Peter's epistle speaks of Christ's singular oblation for sinners. Jesus heals the breach between heaven and earth with his death, rises from the dead and then he preaches "to the spirits in prison." These are the righteous dead in the limbo of the fathers. This number includes Adam, Noah, Abraham, indeed all the ancient patriarchs and prophets.

They have waited from the beginning of the world for the promised Messiah— the one who would be reckoned as the Way and the Truth and the Life. Peter says that the story of Noah prefigures “baptism, which saves you now.”

As a contrast to the rain and waters in the story of Noah, our Lord experiences the heat and dust of the desert for forty days. Gone is the life-filled garden of the first Adam. Death has entered the world. Our Lord is tempted by the devil. Fortunately, this time we have an Adam who will not fall. Jesus begins the work for which he comes into the world. He comes to Galilee preaching the Good News: “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” All of salvation history converges upon Christ and his three years of ministry: teaching, healing, and forgiving. God will keep his promise to send a Savior. He comes not to rescue the righteous or the good, but sinners or the bad. Despite our infidelity, age after age, God is forever faithful.

We came into existence wounded in the womb. Our ancestors through sin contracted suffering and death. All inherited these painful mysteries and needed healing. We were the purloined property of a fallen angel. While our Lord ransomed us back from the devil, Satan still takes delight in tormenting our wound, introducing a spiritual infection and distracting us from the divine physician. Indeed, some have become so duped that they forget God and no longer believe that Satan exists. History is only transformed if we turn to our saving God; otherwise, we find ourselves contaminated by an essential malignancy. It is only with the Lord that we can find spiritual healing and life. While frustrated in his temptation of Christ, the same demon makes his appeal to us. While he has lost an entitlement to the world and to the race of men, he can still exploit his eternal spite. Jesus may have won the war, but the devil can yet abscond with his particular casualties. Christ might claim you but you are not safe until you claim him. Satan would have us mingle with the indifferent crowd, only believing in the strength of what flesh might attain apart from Christ. He tells us to gorge ourselves with earthly riches and proximate pleasures. “Do not worry about what is right or wrong, no matter whether it be in reference to stolen goods, oppressed immigrants or aborted children. The only choices that matter are the ones that satisfy your needs.” The demon tempts and mocks us all while hiding at the periphery of our life and awareness. Like the roaches that scurry when the lights are turned on, we need to allow Jesus who is the Light of the World to dispel all that hides in the darkness. Repentance makes room for believing and loving as we should.

- As people of the covenant, do we keep our promises to God and others?
- Do we sufficiently ponder the price that was paid for our sins?
- Do we go to confession and is our contrition perfect or imperfect?
- Have we read the Gospels or any book about the life of Christ?
- Do we take seriously the discipline about fasting and abstinence?