

1st Sunday in Lent (B) Mark 1: 12 – 15

We are now into the great season of Lent, when we spend six weeks preparing to celebrate the high point of our faith, the Pascal Mystery of Easter. Formerly it was a time of severe penance as a way of purifying ourselves from sin and sinful habits and making ourselves ready to celebrate the Passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Even though we are no longer asked by the Church to observe the severe penances of the past, it is certainly appropriate that we make some form of preparation for the Easter Season. It should be a time for personal reflection by each of us on where we stand as Christians. Only a little reflection will convince us that there are ways in which we fail to be the kind of people the Gospel challenges us to be. But our reflections should not only focus on the negative.

The first readings of Lent this year, present the various covenants God has made through the centuries. A covenant is a binding agreement between people or in the case of Sacred Scripture, between God and His people. The study of these covenants will help us as individuals to prepare for Easter.

In today's reading from Genesis, we hear the Covenant God made with the people at the time of Noah, the Covenant of the Rainbow. Next Sunday, we'll hear about the Covenant of Faith made between God and Abraham. The third Sunday of Lent we will hear the Covenant of the Law made with Moses on Mount Sinai. We will also hear the Covenant of the Heart prophesied by Jeremiah. And

this will all lead to the Pascal Mystery of Easter and the Body and the Blood of the New and Eternal Covenant, the Covenant we will renew, as we do every Sunday, on this altar in just a few minutes.

But today we focus our attention on God's actions at the time of Noah; they are central to the message of Scripture both in the first reading from Genesis and in the second reading from the First Letter of Peter. In Genesis God saw how wicked humanity had become. God was going to wipe out all of creation, people and the animals who were scarred by their sins, their abuse of nature. The Genesis story teaches us that God decided to destroy them all with a flood, but the life of one just man calmed God's anger and that man was Noah. He alone was righteous and blameless because he walked with God. And so, as St. Peter points out, eight people were saved, Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives. Water destroyed the evil of Noah's day, but in the end, water would become the means of our redemption in and through Jesus. Water took away life at the time of Noah. Water would restore life in the time of Jesus. That is why Peter wrote that the waters of the flood prefigure the waters of baptism.

And God set a bow on the clouds... a rainbow. It became a sign that God will never again use a flood to destroy all the creatures of the earth. The rainbow is a sign for us that our God will never give up on his people.

In the past, homilies would at times remind us of the evils and the sinfulness that still exist in our world. Priests

and deacons would remind us of the presence of sin to encourage penance especially during this holy season of Lent. But you don't come to Church to hear the bad news do you. You can hear that and see that every night on the television news.

Now we preachers know better, as Pope Francis delights in reminding us, the Gospel is a message of joy. Jesus did not send out his disciples to tell the world bad news. He sent his disciples then, as he does us today to proclaim the Good News. Everyone who accepts Jesus Christ will be a part of the defeat of evil in the world and will share in the victory of Christ. The Good News is that all the negativity that surrounds us and sometimes feels like it is going to overwhelm us, all this negativity is only a part of the total reality of God's creation.

The truth is the world is good because God created it, and God is good. The truth is people are good because people are made in the image and likeness of God, and God is good. The truth is that you and I are good because we are sons and daughters of God.

And yes, we are not totally naïve. Good people can choose to become evil people, but that is their choice. And they can still choose to reject evil. Our example or our words may be all they need. The world is not evil.

The rainbow. The rainbow proclaims that God sees the good that is in the world. God will not give up on mankind in general. Nor will he give up on us as individuals. God

refuses to give up on any of us no matter what our sins, no matter where we try to hide. We can't give up on ourselves.

Look at the rainbow. Picture it in your mind. Isn't it beautiful, awe inspiring. It is a sign of God's unending love and mercy. That rainbow is a covenant between God and each of us.

That is why we need this purifying period of Lent every year. If in past years we let it go by unnoticed or simply talked about what we were giving up, let this year be different. Let it be like a second spring, an awakening to God's grace in our lives as Christians, as disciples of His Beloved Son.