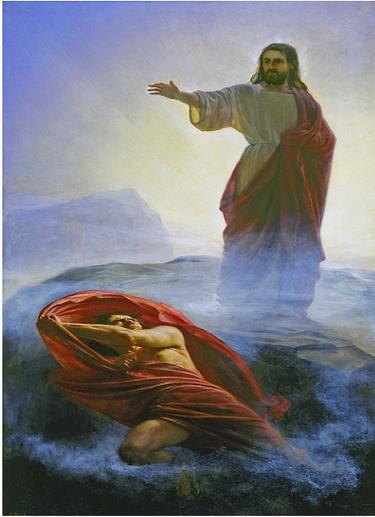


Lectionary Faith-Sharing Community

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT

Cycle B - February 21, 2021



OPENING PRAYER

Guide: *Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

All: **Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God, my savior.**

Leader: Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from old.

All: **In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.**

Guide: *We invoke the presence of the Holy Spirit:*

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send, Lord your spirit and renew the face of the earth. Oh God, that you have instructed the hearts of your faithful with the light of the Holy Spirit, grant us through the same spirit that always enjoy her divine consolation. By Christ, our Lord. Amen.

FIRST READING [Genesis 9 (8-15)]

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:

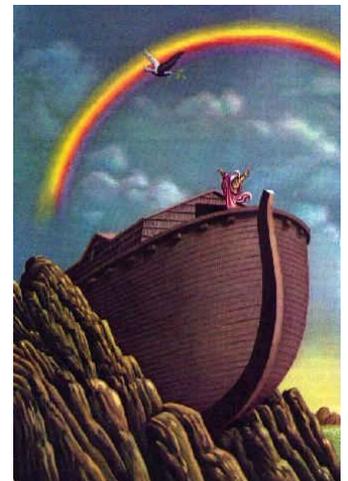
“See, I am now establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you:

all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals that were with you and came out of the ark.

I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth.”

God added:

“This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come, of the covenant between me and you and every living creature with you: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth, and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings, so that the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all mortal beings.”



For the first time in the Bible we find the word Covenant. This Alliance has two differences with the other known ones, the one agreed with Abraham that we will see next week, and the one sealed with Moses, which we will review in two Sundays. This Covenant is not made with a people or with a person, but with all living beings (humanity and animals), and it is unilateral, that is, it starts from God, without expecting anything in return.

Our world is nothing like the original paradise, as there is a lot of violence, hunger, injustices and wars. The men of the 21st century live in fear of a future that seems insecure. But this has been the case for most of human history. Man has always been the cause of his own anguish. That is why, for the believer, the words of this reading can restore the peace that others try to steal from him, including also those who are dedicated to preaching that the end of the world is near. Man must live with hope in a God who always keeps his promises and does not want the destruction of the world.

God wants to establish a kingdom of peace in the world. For this reason, the bow, a symbol of war, is hung in the sky as a symbol of peace. The rainbow, formed by the rays of the sun that cross the skies during the rain, heralds the end of the storm and the reappearance of the sun.

- (1) Do announcements and "predictions" of the end of the world scare you? Why?
- (2) Try to remember other times when humanity thought the end was near.
- (3) What says the Christian's faith about the end of his life?
- (4) After answering the previous question, reflect on whether it is worth worrying about the predictions that others proclaim that "the end is near."
- (5) What can we do to be fearlessly prepared to face our end in this world?
- (6) If you had to preach, what topic would you prefer?: Announce the punishment you will suffer if you do not behave or announce the reward you will receive if you behave well. Why?

SECOND READING [1 Peter 3 (18-22)]

Beloved: Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the Spirit. In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison, who had once been disobedient while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.

This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

Scholars think that this letter responds to a baptismal sermon that was preserved by the first Christians until it was considered part of the New Testament of the Christian Scriptures. At the beginning of the fragment that is proclaimed, the author says that Jesus Christ died only once. In other words, his sacrifice was sufficient to reconcile humanity to God. Jesus Christ was true man, and that is why he suffers death. But because the fullness of the life-giving Spirit dwelt in him, he was able to rise again. (That fullness of the Spirit is carried by us now, after having received baptism, and for that reason we will be resurrected, like Christ).

The "spirits imprisoned" were in "hell" (which is not the same as "the hell"). Having died for sinners, Jesus Christ descends into the underworld, a symbolic place where the souls of the dead dwelt. There he announces the "inauguration" of the heavenly paradise, which will open on the day of his Ascension, forty days later.

Baptism is a symbol of a rebirth from the waters, as occurs with those who survive with Noah. Just as those "eight persons" were saved from death, baptism offers us the birth of a new life. Baptism is an effective symbol that makes us participate in the death of Christ, and guarantees us the right to the resurrection, which will occur when God so orders.

- (1) What gives us the fullness of the Spirit? What are the consequences of this fullness of the Spirit? Find the answer in the previous comments. Discuss this idea.
- (2) Circumcision is a ritual ceremony, to fulfill a legal precept, of external sign. Baptism, on the other hand, does not leave visible signs, but produces an important effect. Where? And for what?
- (3) The Theology of Baptism speaks of "a dying and a rebirth." Now that Lent is beginning, could you consider something in particular that you should "die" to?

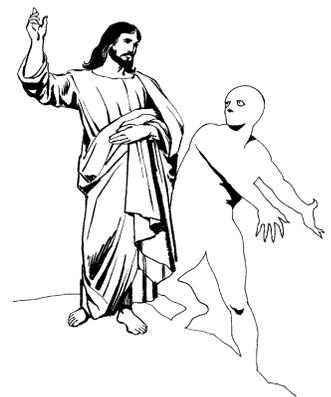
GOSPEL [Mark 1 (12-15)]

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.

He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:

"This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel."



The first thing we notice in this version of Mark is the simplicity of words. Concise, rather, we could say. We are used to reading the chapter on the temptations of Jesus in more detail, and even with a dialogue with the evil one. Here the evangelist limits himself to saying what we have just read, but he adds that he lived among wild animals, and that angels served him. We could come to interpret, according to this version, that Jesus was not tempted at the end of the forty days, as is read elsewhere, but during all that time he spent in the desert. We could also understand that there is no fasting because the angels provide Jesus with miraculous and heavenly food. So we have a kind of anticipation of what the paradise that comes to bring humanity means: The beasts do not hurt and there is no lack of food. It is a turning point in human history. It is the inauguration of a harmonious and wonderful time.

Then, abruptly, the author takes us to Galilee and incidentally tells us that they have arrested John the Baptist. For the first time in the Gospels the word *Gospel* (Good News) is used and incidentally tells us what it consists of: That "the Kingdom of God is already near." He immediately establishes a condition to be able to take better advantage of it: Conversion and Faith. Mark is the only evangelist who writes "Gospel", and we find that Paul uses the same term frequently. There is no doubt that both knew and shared apostolic activities in common, so they start from the same concept: It is the announcement of Jesus, so that all may be saved. Jesus is the Gospel.

But Jesus is a person who must be tempted, overcome dangers, and take risks. The Gospel talks about Jesus and is about Jesus. God made man is present in the dominions of Satan, the world, represented on the earth where the wild beasts dwell. Temptation is an everyday reality and the text can help us to think that the beginning of the kingdom of God requires passing through the desert. The Gospel according to Mark does not show us a tempted Jesus, but rather a prophet and Messiah. He proposes to us a reality (the kingdom of God) that demands of us a radical conversion.

(1) Read Isaiah 11:1-9. What ideas do you find in common with today's gospel?

(2) In these short paragraphs we find the following verbs: Drive - Withdraw - Stay - Tempt - Live - Serve - Go - Preach - Say - Fulfill - Stay - Become - Believe. Share with the group what these words suggest to you.

(3) Sometimes it happens that an athlete or a character shares their experiences of sacrifice and we feel admiration and even desire to imitate them. Now we have Jesus in the desert, who survives the temptations victorious. What does this tell us for the beginning of Lent?

(4) Traditionally we have been taught that Lent is a time to stop doing things (fasting, abstinence, etc.). Does the idea that this year you propose not to stop doing, but to do something that you do not regularly seem interesting to you? (The group can contribute ideas. These are acts that involve giving up one's time, money, etc.)

CLOSING PRAYER

Leader: *Lord of the day and night, of the beginning and of the end: At the closing of this meeting, once again we lift up our hearts to You, divine source of all life.*

All: **We thank you for the gifts you have bestowed on us. We thank you for the love expressed in companionship and understanding, mutual respect and shared ideas. We give you thanks for your holy power that will help us in our concerns that we have shared. For these and all the gifts that come from You, we give you thanks.**

Leader: *Lord hear our prayers* (attendees can propose their own needs of prayer)

All: **In the same way in which we have being blessed by your presence as we meet, we ask now to bless our safe return to our homes. May your holy blessing be over us + in the name of the Father ...**

Leader: *May the King of the eternal glory gather us together in His heavenly banquet. Amen.*