

**February 21, 2021 Noah and the Flood Homily:** A prominent American rabbi was once asked a pointed question by one of his rabbinical students. "Rabbi", he said. "Who, in your opinion is the most tragic figure in the bible?" Without hesitation he replied, "Surely it is God". Momentarily stunned, the student asked for an explanation. The rabbi reasoned as follows: "God is repeatedly disappointed by his favorite creature... the human being. He has given him the gift of freedom. Time and again he abuses his freedom by falling into sin. What does God see from above if not human cruelty, corruption, lawlessness and senseless violence?" In the Torah we learn that "God regretted that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was saddened". (Gen. 6:6)

So God decided to destroy the world. (Gen. 6:7)

The story of Noah and the flood is familiar to many of us. The flood was a consequence of sin and God's punishment.

But God remembered Noah, the key figure in the narrative. Noah, a just and blameless person, walked with God. Only he and his family were spared God's wrath. Because of his righteousness, he offers Noah and his descendants a new covenant. He promises that he will never again destroy mankind.

"I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all the creatures be destroyed by the waters of the flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth." (Gen. 9:11)

After the flood waters subside and Noah is finally able to emerge from the Ark after enduring months of deprivations and sufferings, his first act is to build an altar and offer a sacrifice to God as a visible expression of thanksgiving for the survival of he and of his family. To this God replies with his promise, the reassuring sign of which is a bow in the clouds. It is hung in the sky never to take aim at the whole earth and its people again. It is a sign of peace!

The rain is over.

The waters are gone; and

One can once again walk on the earth.

The Jewish writer and Nobel Prize laureate, Elie Weisel, once wrote of the Jews who were liberated from one of notorious concentration camps, Buchenwald. They welcomed their freedom in a strange manner. They did not take the food offered by their American liberators. Instead, they gathered in circles and their first act as free human beings was to pray, thus glorifying the Name of God.

Now fast forward to the year 1989. When the Berlin Wall came down and the East Germans were finally liberated, the first act for many was not to offer a prayer of thanksgiving for their deliverance, but to frequent the many sex shops in West Berlin.

It is consoling to know that God does not give up on us. He still has faith in us. There is always an opportunity to rebuild our lives after a catastrophe. There is a possibility of a rainbow at the end.

Noah is a mysterious figure. Why was he the one chosen and not someone else? Was he, and he alone, the only righteous person on earth?

Some years ago, the journalist, Bill Moyers led a panel discussion on the story of Noah and the flood. His introductory words are worth noting:

“We have all heard the cry. ‘Why did I survive the war and my buddy didn’t?’ ‘Why was I the only one to walk away from the crash?’ ‘Why did cancer take her and not me?’ Surviving a catastrophe is a complex and painful destiny. Just look at Noah. His response to the great flood is to build an altar and get drunk. In a way we are all survivors of that ordeal, and it doesn’t make us feel any better knowing that the author of the apocalypse was none other than God.”

In Jesus Christ, God made a covenant with mankind, a new and everlasting covenant. On the day we were christened the old man was put to death and a new man emerges from the sacramental waters.

The author of the Book of Genesis informs us that “God remembered Noah”. (Gen. 8:1)

As we begin this Lenten season, let us fervently pray that God remembers each one of us because of our fidelity to his commandments and our decision to stand apart from those who dishonor the name of God.

Amen!