

Homily: February 21, 2021

1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9: 8 – 15; Psalm 25: 4-9; 1 Peter 3: 18 – 22; Mark 1: 12 - 15

The season of Lent traditionally has been identified as a somber, stark period of prayer and penance. But judging from the reading from Genesis this 1st Sunday of Lent can hardly be labeled as dull, drab, and dismal, for one of the Bible's most colorful characters, Noah, is in the spotlight. Noah was argumentative and stubborn. Someone you would not think of as being a messenger of God. But time and time again we read of God choosing the most unlikely person to be his spokesperson. One thinks of the young shepherd boy David who slew Goliath and later became king of Israel, also the fiery teenager John the Baptist, and the young Virgin Mary all were unlikely spokesperson for God.

The story of Noah, the ark, the flood, and the rainbow are familiar to us all; it has all the elements of an action movie a worldwide flood, a dramatic rescue in a boat, and a happy ending set against the backdrop of a rainbow. This story never fails to fascinate readers young and old. The key word of the reading, the one word that gives understanding and meaning to the season of Lent is the word: **Covenant**. It is used no less than five times in the brief seven verses of the reading.

Granted the term covenant is not exactly a common one that we use day by day in ordinary conversation. We don't say "How's you covenant today?" Yet covenant is one of the key concepts of our faith. Covenant is the word that is heard again and again throughout the Bible.

In religious understanding covenant means God's special relationship to us and our special relationship to God. In this covenant God promises never again to destroy the earth by flood, for it is God's will ultimately not destroy the earth but to redeem it. As a universal symbol to all his continuing presence God sets a "bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." It is a symbol of God's continuing presence among us even today in a covenant; the rainbow connects heaven and earth. Without the covenant God would be impersonal, far-distant, cold, uninvolved, and unconcerned Creator that flicked a switch at creation and let it go at that. With the covenant God is personal and passionate, closer to us than we are to ourselves, the giver of every breath we take and every heartbeat we make. It is the Sacrament of Baptism that we are initiated into covenant relationship with God. How close is God to us?

Well at every Mass we hear Jesus announce God's new covenant. On the night before he died, at the Last Supper, Jesus took the cup filled with wine and said, "This is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and everlasting covenant. It will be shed for you so that sins may be forgiven." At every Eucharist we renew our commitment to living out the demands of being disciples of Christ. In the Prayer after Communion, we thank God for the awesome gift of His Son in the bread and wine of Holy Communion where our

“...faith is nourished, hope increased, and charity strengthened...” so we may live out the covenant and renew our commitment to it at Easter.

May this season bring us back to the basic but mind-boggling truth of God's unconditional love for each of us in the New Covenant of Jesus' blood.

Fr. Bill