

First Sunday of Lent

Genesis 9, 8-15; 1Peter 3, 18-22; Mark 1, 12-15

No one has to tell us that we are living in a world of miseries. We are all aware of that. And no one can imagine the suffering and anguish caused by the pandemic and calamities.

We are all aware of the winter storm that has left millions of homes and businesses without power and water. As reported¹, at least 38 people have died from winter storms and frigid conditions.

This is happening to people, people with families, people already exhausted coping with the pandemic, people not unlike you and me.

And for those people who are experiencing unimaginable adversity, and those of us just hearing about, it is very heart-breaking - in many ways not unlike the world Noah was facing. Imagine what it must have been like for Noah and his family. The world he knew was gone; the future so uncertain. Trying to trust God in the midst of chaos must have been extremely difficult for him. Miseries and uncertainties were everywhere.

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ:

Living in these difficult and challenging times, we are faced not only with physical danger, but spiritual danger as well. Not only our health and safety of our loved ones and friends are being threatened, our relationships with God and other people are at risk.

You see, when we read stories and hear about tragedies striking the world over, day after day, we get convinced that the danger is a product of the world that has gone bad. Everything seems to be so wrong with the world today. And we are convinced that if people would stop wasting God's graces, refrain from sinning and blaming God, the world would become a better place.

And that my friends, in some ways, is more dangerous than all the bombs and guns and tanks, because what is at risk are our very souls.

The world is broken and in need of healing, not so much because of illness and suffering, but because of the failure of individuals to love and care for one another. That includes us, you and me.

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The world is crying and in pain, not because of its sinfulness, but because individuals have turned the world God made into what it is today and inflicted wounds upon it. And, that includes you and me.

The world is in chaos and full of miseries, not because of tragedy and calamity or lack of resources, but because the people to whom God has entrusted its care have focused more on themselves and their selfish hearts. That's us, too.

In midst of dangers facing the world, physical as well as spiritual, God has not left the world to its demises. God pledges to be faithful to us for all time -- as we heard in the First Reading from Genesis -- no matter how many times we stray, how many times we disobey, how many times we are blatantly unfaithful. Imagine that -- no matter how many times we choose not to be good to God, God always chooses to be good to us.

And this God of ours loves us so much that he became one of us to show us exactly how to love, how to care for other people -- how to embrace life and goodness to the fullest -- in every time, place and circumstance, without counting the cost. God loved and loves us so much that in the words of St. Peter, in today's Second Reading:

“Christ suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God.”

And of course, this God of ours didn't just die for us, he rose for us too, and in doing so, destroyed death -- forever showing us that love will always triumph over evil, even over death itself.

That's what Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of God:

**“This is the time of fulfillment ...
believe in the gospel.”**

That's why it's such Good News to believe. That's why responding to a God who loves us first is the very essence our relationships with God and with others are made of. And that's why reflecting on what we truly believe in faith and how truly we believe is such a critical part of having a fruitful Lent.

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Dear friends, Today's the first Sunday of Lent; the Season of Lent is just getting underway. And it may seem as though this Lent will be like so many of the others -- a time to only focus on the negative, bad, evil things. It doesn't have to be only that, though.

Let's also let it be a time to rejoice in the truths of our faith.

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him might not perish
but might have eternal life.”³**

If we can focus more on that, if we can embrace with joy our relationships with God, if we can reach out with compassion to other people, in particular the hungry, the poor, the sorrowful, the sick, we can be sure of the new life with Christ in the Resurrection of the dead, and the everlasting life with God forever.

And that's what Lent all is about: loving and “doing something beautiful”² for God and one another. Amen.

¹ CNN

² *Mother Teresa of Calcutta*

³ *John 3: 16*