



Christ in Our Neighborhood

Prayer

Father, through our observance of Lent, help us to understand the meaning of Your Son's death and resurrection, and teach us to reflect it in our lives. Grant this through our Lord, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, God for ever and ever. Amen.

Commentary

1st Reading: Genesis 9:8-15

Every covenant is sealed with a sign. The sign of a marriage covenant is a ring. The sign of ordination to priesthood is a stole.

The Bible's first covenant between God and humanity is found in the story of Noah and the ark. The sign to seal the covenant is the rainbow. Every time there is a storm, the rainbow will "remind God" of the covenant He made with Noah to never flood the earth again.

Covenantal signs point to the past, present, or future. The rainbow reminds us of the promise God made to us long ago - the past. It also prefigures our baptism - the present. Finally, as our Gospel relates, it points to the promise of the Kingdom of God - the future.

This first covenantal sign in Genesis is the first revelation of God to humanity after the fall of Adam. As we progress through Lent, we will see how God reveals Himself to us in various stages: a covenant with Noah, then Abraham, then Moses and Israel. Finally, we will see the fullness of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

Question

In what way has God been revealed to you?

Commentary

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

Peter reminds us that, just as Noah and his family were saved through water, we are saved through Baptism. The flood and the covenantal sign of the rainbow prefigured baptism, "which saves you now."

While the covenantal sign at the time of Noah points to the saving waters of Baptism for us today, the Sacrament of Baptism points to - and is - the saving work of Christ in His Church. Unlike a rainbow, Baptism is more than a sign. A sign may point to redemption. A Sacrament is our redemption in Christ. As St. Paul reminds us:

"Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life." (Rom 6:3-4)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church reads:

"Through the Holy Spirit, Baptism is a bath that purifies, justifies, and sanctifies." (1227)

Lent is a purification time to help us remember the significance of Baptism in our lives. It is also a time for members of the Rite of Christian Initiation to be received into the Church through the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation at Easter. We remember them in prayer!

Question

What does the Sacrament of Baptism mean to you today?

First Sunday of Lent

Commentary

Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

Mark gives us the shortest Gospel account of the three accounts of the 40 days and nights Jesus spent in the desert.

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke tell us about the kind of temptations that Jesus had to endure. Mark simply states that he was tempted by Satan.

The connection with the first Reading about Noah is the number “40.” Why 40? Why 40 days and nights in the desert, or in the flood, or 40 years of Moses in the desert?

Most scholars believe that the number 40 referred to a time of purification and birth. The Talmud states the ancient Jewish belief that it took 40 days for an embryo to be formed in the mother’s womb.

After the 40 days, according to Leviticus, a mother goes through a period of another 40 days of ritual purification after the birth of her male child.

The desert time for Jesus takes place immediately after his Baptism in the Jordan by John the Baptist. Could it be that Jesus was going through a purification like a mother after the birth of her child? Or was it more of a time of waiting, like an expectant mother, before Christ was ready to begin His mission? Perhaps it was both.

Question

How will you make the most of these Lenten 40 days of waiting and purification?

This Week’s Task

Make a personal 40 minutes in the desert. Quiet yourself before the Blessed Sacrament in the church, or find a place to recollect. As you do so, examine your temptations and nothing else. Like Jesus, this period of waiting and purification should not be a period for planning. Resist any need to plan. Just wait and be purified as you examine your conscience and confront your temptations.

Prayer

The leader invites members to pass a bowl of water and make a sign of the cross as a personal renewal of their own Baptism.

The leader then invites each member to pass a bowl of sand (an image of the desert). As a member holds the bowl of sand, he/ she will say:

“Lord,
purify my heart, my mind, and my soul.”

The leader will invite the members to take forty seconds to examine just one temptation that they would like to confront in this period of Lent.

The leader will then guide the group in praying Psalm 25:4-9.

Psalm

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

Your ways, O Lord, make known to me; teach me your paths.

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior.

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

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

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

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

Good and upright is the Lord,
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and he teaches the humble his way.

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

Conclude with an OUR FATHER.

“Reform
your lives
and
believe in the
Good News!”