

First Sunday of Lent

What do we think of when we see a rainbow? Perhaps we look to see how many colours we can recognize. Perhaps we think of the pot of gold that is meant to be found at the end of the rainbow. When the people of Israel saw a rainbow, they thought of the solemn agreement that God made with Noah after the flood. They remembered that God promised never again to let a destructive flood devastate the earth. Noah promised that he and his family would make the most of the new start that had been offered to them by God.

Rainbows seem to come not at the beginning of a storm but when the storm has past, and the sun has broken through again. Rainbows are signs of the good weather that is ahead. We could say that they are signs of hope. The covenants that God makes with humankind always come after a time of failure and sin. Time and time again the human partners in the covenant fail and break the covenant. But God is always faithful. God is always ready to give us another chance. Every Lent is a time when God renews his covenant of love with us. Every Lent prepares us to celebrate the everlasting covenant that Jesus sealed with his blood.

St. Peter remembers Noah and the flood in the letter we read today. He sees the flood as being a sign of Baptism where we are immersed into the life of the Risen Lord.

Today's reading helps us to focus on where we are going through Lent. We are preparing for that moment when at the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday Masses we will renew our Baptismal commitment to live as followers of Jesus. Lent is the time when we ask God to help us to see anything that prevents us from living to the full the life of the Risen Lord.

After reminding us that "every moment of our lives is a time for believing, hoping, and loving," Pope Francis concludes his Lenten message for this year by reminding us that "The call to experience Lent as a journey of conversion, prayer and sharing of our goods, helps us – as communities and as individuals – to revive the faith that comes from the living Christ, the hope inspired by the breath of the Holy Spirit and the love flowing from the merciful heart of the Father."

Our Gospel from Mark follows immediately after the story of Jesus being baptised by John. The same Spirit who came down upon Jesus at his Baptism now drives him out into the desert to face a time of testing. The desert or the wilderness is a place of contrasts. It is the place where Moses first experienced meeting God in the burning bush. It is the place where many of the prophets came to know God in a new and powerful way. But the wilderness is also a place where people are put to the test. We think of the time that the people of Israel spent

in the desert on their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. The forty years they spent in the desert was a great time of testing for them. But it was also a time when God revealed how close he was to his people. It was a time when the people learnt how loved they were God.

Today's gospel speaks about Jesus being with the wild beasts and the angels looked after him. Are we able to recognize some of the angels who look after us when we are at risk? Are we able to recognize some of the times when God may be using us as angels, acting in God's name for others?

You and I need to know how loved we are by our God before we can be free enough to let God use us in the ways that God may desire. You and I need to know that we are loved by God before we can reach out in love to others. During our journey through the desert of Lent we are invited to hear the Lenten call to repentance in a new way. We hear Jesus say to us, "Repent and believe the Good News." The good news is that we are loved by God without condition. When we know something of that love, when we believe that good news, then we can invite God in to change our lives, then we can repent.

We are called to repent because the kingdom of God is close at hand. We hear a lot about the Kingdom of God throughout the Gospels. It is a hard concept for us to get

our minds around. Every time we pray the Our Father we say to God, "Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." We need to say this every day. Bit by bit as we open our hearts to the Lord, we make room for God's kingdom. The fullness of God's kingdom will only come at the end of time.

This weekend we are called to pray for the families whose children are preparing for Confirmation and First Holy Communion. We pray that these families may have an ever-deeper sense of being part of the family of the Church in this place. We pray that they may have a clear sense of being supported by us as they make their way towards Easter with us.