Homily of First Week of Lent, Year B

The first reading tells us about God's covenant with Noah. I think that what Noah did after surviving the flood contributed to God's covenant with him. "So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives; and all the animals, all the birds, and all the crawling creatures that crawl on the earth went out of the ark by families. Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and choosing from every clean animal and every clean bird, he offered burnt offerings on the altar. When the Lord smelled the sweet odor, the Lord said to himself: Never again will I curse the ground because of human beings, since the desires of the human heart are evil from youth; nor will I ever again strike down every living being, as I have done. All the days of the earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:18-22). In Genesis 9:1 and 7, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them: Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."

If Noah had taken his surviving the flood for granted, I do not think he would have received such blessings, followed by a covenant. How much spiritual sacrifice and gratitude did we give to God after Hurricane Harvey? Has all our attention been on what was lost? Noah's first attention was not to rebuild his house; rather, his first attention was to build an altar for the Lord and offered a sacrifice to the Lord from the best of his animals. It was a good idea that after Hurricane Harvey our first emphasis here in St. Francis of Assisi parish was to find a place of worship. May God grant us the same blessings he granted to Noah. May he make a new covenant with us. May he multiply us and make us fruitful.

The sign of God's covenant with Noah was the rainbow. In our time, the sign of God's covenant is Jesus. The new rainbow is Jesus. The Book of Hebrews says, "Jesus [is] the guarantee of an even better covenant. … Therefore, he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:22-25).

In the first reading God says, "Never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth." Here, God was not talking about flood caused by rain, but the flood caused by sin. In Christ, God has made a covenant that evil will not defeat goodness. In Christ is the salvation of humanity. The flood caused by sin keeps rising because the world continues to move away from Jesus Christ who is the source of salvation.

The Lenten Season is one of the special times God invites us, through the Church, to come back to the source of our salvation. It is a season of repentance and grace. The practical steps to repentance are spelt out for us:

Prayer: We are invited to renew our prayer life by saying our private prayers again, and by participating in parish spiritual programs like Stations of the Cross and Mass.

Fasting and abstinence: It is a time to discipline the body for spiritual growth. This type of fasting is not for losing weight and to have a better bodily appearance. To have such in mind defeats the purpose. We are invited, during the Lenten Season, to abstain from things that give us pleasure.

Charity (almsgiving and good work): We are invited to sacrifice time, talent, material and money for the benefit of those in need, especially to those who will not be able to reward us.

Repentance: The time of Lent is a special invitation of spiritual checkups and tune-ups. It is a time of renewal of covenant with God in the various Sacraments we have received. There will be parish penitential service at the beginning of the Holy Week to help us be ready for the blessings of Easter.

The Gospel is about the temptation of Jesus. We may be tempted not to keep the Lenten observances. May we have the grace to conquer every temptation. May the blessings of the Lenten Season abide with each one of us. Amen.

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