

Homily of First Week of Lent Year B, 2021

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

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. Scripture says, "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). The entire first reading contains details of God's covenant with Noah. Noah did not take his surviving the flood for granted. He built an altar to the Lord and offered sacrifice. Noah's gratitude, thanksgiving, and putting God first earned him God's covenant. This teaches us the power of gratitude, thanksgiving, and putting God first. May we be able to offer God sweet smelling sacrifice. May God smell our sacrifice and renew his covenant with us. Amen.

I still remember the impressive way my catechism teacher, years ago, presented the story of Noah. He said that Noah warned his country people about the impending rain and flood as a result of their sinful life; but they did not believe him. They preferred their worldly and sinful life. When the rain and flood came, they all perished.

As Noah warned his country people to repent of their sins (according to my catechism teacher), Jesus warns us in today's gospel, "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). St. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus Christ is the new Noah's ark that lifts us up to safety and leads us to God (second reading, 1 Peter 3:18). Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

The readings invite us to soul-searching. Am I, stubbornly, engaged in a behavior or behaviors that if I do not disengage from, would ruin my life, my faith, my career, my business, my finance, my family, my vocation, my position, my job, my marriage, my future, and so on? When St. Paul says that the wages of sin is death; sometimes, it could be bodily death; but most of the time, it is spiritual death, especially the ruin a person brings upon himself or herself. 1 Peter 3:15 says, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation..." Many people take God's patience for granted at a very high cost as Noah's country people did. Let us make hay while the sun shines. Let us catch the dark skinned goat before nightfall. Today, we hear the Lord calling; let us not harden our hearts (Psalm 95:7). Let us not be wise in our own eyes (Proverbs 3:7). "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: 'He catches the wise in their own ruses,' and again: 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain'" (1 Corinthians 3:19).

The Lenten Season is one of the special times God invites us to come back to the source of our salvation. It is a season of grace and a season of repentance.

In today's gospel reading, the Spirit drove Jesus into the desert where he was tempted by Satan. Jesus was among wild beasts, but the angels ministered to him. In the same way, we are in all kinds of deserts; and encountering all kinds of trials and temptations. We are among all kinds of dangerous and prowling wild beasts. We pray God to send his angels to minister to us, and guide us to triumph over trials, conquer temptations, and strengthen us to survive the prowling of every dangerous wild beast. Amen.

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