

First Sunday Lent
Cycle B
February 20, 2021

We began our Lenten journey with Ash Wednesday. Lent is always a somber time, where we are asked to fast, give alms, or sacrifice, and pray. It is a great opportunity to focus on areas of our life that keep us from getting closer to our Lord. The season of Lent calls us to enter our own journey through the desert of our own lives to repent, and seek reconciliation with God, ourselves, and each other. I remember growing up in a large family, mom would post a note on the refrigerator on Ash Wednesday, “No meat today.” I went to a Catholic school in Brooklyn, so we were certainly made aware of Lent. Fridays during Lent always meant tuna fish sandwiches for lunch. Mom made her macaroni pie on Fridays for dinner and there was always fish sticks around. We would be expected to give up something for lent maybe candy, or cookies. We put coins in these little boxes (mite boxes) in Catholic school. All the statues were covered in purple and there was no water in the Holy water fountains. I did not understand what it all meant but I knew it was a sad time unlike Christmas, and we remembered Jesus’ death on a cross.

Today is the First Sunday of Lent. The season of Lent is 40 days in preparation for Easter. I think that each year this special season can mean something different to us. Hopefully as we grow older and mature, we can use this time to grow more deeply in our relationship with Christ. It is also a time for Baptism as Catechumenates prepare to receive the sacrament at the Easter Vigil and for us who are Baptized. In our Church we have a young man, Ariel Segal who is in the RCIA program who will receive his sacraments of Baptism, Communion and Confirmation at the Easter Vigil.

But this is a time for all of us to renew our Baptismal vows and all the 3 readings point us to our Baptismal Covenant. In Genesis, the account of Noah and the flood take up a great deal of the Book. The pattern set (creation, sin, destruction, recreation) is one that repeats itself again and again in the Bible. Today's selection takes place right after the flood just after Noah and his family and the animals have left the ark. We hear about the original covenant that God made with Noah after the flood in the first reading. The first reading about Noah is seen as prefiguring Baptism. Humanity had greatly sinned and there were consequences. Placed at the beginning of lent you and I are asked to look at how we have fallen short of our Baptismal promises and do something about it. At Baptism we were brought into God's people and in that Rite, we were cleansed of sin by God's grace.

In the second reading, Peter is mentioning of Noah clearly indicates that the story of Noah has long been seen as a foreshadowing of Christian Baptism. Through the sacrament we are reborn and believe that a person no longer lives for himself or herself. It challenges us to live for others to join the mission of Christ to spread the good news of hope and salvation.

The first Sunday of Lent always presents us with Jesus' temptation in the desert. Mark's account is much shorter than Luke or Matthew's, but it does parallel many events and figures in the Old Testament. This event takes place right after Jesus' Baptism and it is his preparation or public ministry.

There is a lot of symbolism here especially with the number 40. The fact that Jesus spent 40 days in the desert is significant. This recalls the 40 years that the Israelites wandered in the desert after being led from slavery in

Egypt. The prophet Elijah also journeyed in the desert for 40 days and nights, making his way to Horeb, the mountain of God, where he was also attended to by an angel of the Lord. Remembering the significance of these events, we also set aside 40 days for the season of Lent. The author is connecting the Old Testament to the New.

The message, “Repent, and Believe” is so necessary especially for us living today. We are living in a very, difficult complicated time. Many await a vaccine so that they will be protected from the Corona virus. We are being challenged by a secular world that in many ways, conflicts with our Catholic faith. Norms of behavior are being challenged, in some ways it seems that people want to erase or change history. It can cause a lot of anxiety.

Lent, if we take it seriously, is a good time to spend reflecting where you are on our journey to eternal salvation. Are we on a kind of cruise control where we are so caught up with all the outside problems that we do not think about Jesus? Are we caught up in narcissism and selfishness that is everywhere in our culture? The world does not revolve around you and what you want and think you need. As travel along our Lenten journey, this is a hopeful reminder to all of us that like Jesus we too can overcome temptation but recognize we cannot do it alone. There is an expression, “Opportunity knock once, but temptation leans on the doorbell.” How true how true, sometimes in our spiritual life, it seems we take two steps back for everyone step we move forward. Lent is the perfect time to look into the mirror and take an honest account of ourselves. *During this special time of lent that we have been given, reflect on those areas of your life where you struggle with temptation. Prayer, Almsgiving (sacrifice) and fasting are tools we can use to help us on our journey.* Rather than just giving up

sweets or deserts, perhaps it would help you spiritually to turn away from the things that keep you from God. It may be in little things like petty jealousies and being envious of the good fortune of others, gossiping. It could be in some serious problems including addictions, violence, or destructive behaviors. Whatever it is, we all need this special period Lent. It gives us time to help us transform into the person our Lord meant us to be. The sacrament of Reconciliation is a blessing and I encourage you to take advantage of it here or in other churches. If we look honestly at ourselves, we will find that we battle temptations all the time, but we keep putting ourselves in front of things that tempt us. Like a person with an addiction who keeps hanging out with the same bunch people or visit the same places that we know are not good for him.

God is all merciful and once again calls us to himself during this Lenten season. He never gives up on you and me, but he has given us a free will to choose between what brings us closer to Him or what moves us away. Find some quiet place without the TV or radio where you can quietly pray and be at peace. The world is just too noisy. During the coming weeks reflect on your own struggles and temptations and use this precious time to overcome them and become the loving person you were created to be.

May God Bless you.