

BIBLE STUDY
February 15, 2021

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 9: 8-15
1 Peter 3: 18-22
Mark 1: 12-15

1. The Scripture Readings of Lent

- During Lent, the first reading comes from the Old Testament as usual, but it is chosen to help us remember Salvation History, i.e., the deeds that God has performed in history that led up to the greatest of his deeds, the death and resurrection of Jesus. During this Cycle B, the first readings remind us of (1) God's covenant with Noah after the flood; (2) the testing of Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his son, Isaac; (3) the giving of the Ten Commandments; (4) A summary of how the kings of Israel and Judah did not follow the commands of God and rejected his prophets over and over again; (5) the new covenant that God will make with his people by writing his law upon their hearts.
- The first Sunday of Lent is always an account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert. The second Sunday of Lent is always the Transfiguration of Jesus. In this Cycle B, we read from John's Gospel during Lent in addition to Mark. We read the Cleansing of the Temple, John 3:16, and Jesus' agony in John's gospel. Palm Sunday is always the Passion of the Lord.

2. Genesis 9: 8-15

- Ancient civilizations all seem to have a story of a great flood that destroyed the world. What differs is the reaction to the flood. Some stories interpret the flood as a change in the gods' original plan for creation. The gods plan now to limit the number of persons. The Judeo-Christian account shows God renewing his promise to both human beings and animals. He establishes a covenant—a solemn agreement—that he will not destroy the world by flood again. In verse 7, God renews the command to be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth.
- V 8-10: God establishes a covenant with every human being and animal coming out of the ark.
- V 11: He will never destroy the earth again by a flood.
- V 12-14: the rainbow will be the sign of the covenant.
- V 15: God will remember his covenant—he will be faithful.

3. Mark 1: 12-15

- Mark's account of the temptations is very brief and with few details. Unlike Matthew and Luke, he does not describe the specifics of the temptations.
- V. 12: After the baptism and the proclamation by God that Jesus is his Beloved Son, he is driven out into the wilderness by the Spirit. There is a

- The wilderness: not exactly a desert, but uncharted territory. A place where one must depend upon God and trust him because one cannot rely on self or other supports.
- In Mark, the temptations may be better described as testing. Jesus is put to the test—will he trust God alone or not? Just as Israel was tested in the desert, will Jesus let God lead him? We all live in a wilderness, meaning that life is uncertain and unknown. We do not have a road map or a GPS that gives us directions. We go to let God lead and trust in him. The test is whether we will seek comfort in the past out of nostalgia or be paralyzed because we look to the future in fear.
- Forty days is a symbolic number which means a special time when God speaks to the heart.
- He was among wild beasts and the angels ministered to him is a symbolic landscape in which Jesus was surrounded by danger and by evil (wild beasts) and with goodness and protection (ministering angels). Like us, Jesus lived in a world of good and evil, but God looked after him and protected him.
- After his testing in the desert, Jesus emerges to begin his public ministry. It is timed to the arrest of John, meaning the end of the old age and the beginning of the new.
- Jesus mission: to proclaim the Gospel of God. Gospel means the content of Jesus' preaching, the good news of salvation; or the very life of Jesus that embodies the message of Good News; or the story of his death and resurrection for our salvation. It has a multi-faceted meaning.
- Repent and believe: Repent=metanoia to make a complete change of heart and mind. To make a 180 degree turn from our former self. To believe=to trust that what God promises he will do. To have a relationship of trust with God.

4. 1 Peter 3: 18-22

- V 18: Although Jesus was innocent, he died for us, he guilty in order to save us and lead us to God. He truly died and he truly was raised up in the spirit.
- V 19-20: This verse is ambiguous. Who are these spirits? Are they the ones who were disobedient and who did not enter the ark? Only a few were saved by the ark. There is an urgency for us to be saved so that we do not undergo the same fate.
- V 21: The ark prefigures Baptism. Baptism saves us from death. The waters of the flood bring death, but the water of Baptism bring life if we are safely in the ark which is the church. Baptism is not only the forgiveness of sin but is also a relationship with God in which God removes our guilt (gives us a clear conscience) through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- V 22: Jesus is in glory at the right hand of the father with angels and all other authorities and powers under his feet.