

First Sunday of Lent – B  
Fr. Chad S. Green  
Mary, Queen of Peace Catholic Church  
Sammamish, Washington  
21 February 2021

Genesis 9:8-15  
Psalm 25  
1 Peter 3:18-22  
(Matthew 4:4b) Mark 1:12-15

### *The Lenten Flood*

Each year we begin the First Sunday of Lent with the Temptation of Jesus from one of the three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke).<sup>1</sup> As we are beginning our own annual forty-day journey through the desert of Lent, we hear about Jesus' forty-day experience in the desert. As the Gospel of Mark tends to do, his account is very brief. Just two verses:

At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan. He was among wild beasts, and the angels ministered to him.<sup>2</sup>

The Gospels of Matthew and Luke, however, provide many more details, including the three ways that Jesus was tempted by Satan:

bodily pleasure (food: turn stones into bread)<sup>3</sup>  
glory (an amazing feat: throw yourself off the temple)<sup>4</sup>  
power (material wealth: all the kingdoms of the world)<sup>5</sup>

These are the three basic categories that each of us human beings can struggle with in our own battle for holiness.

And, what it comes down to is a battle for *faith*. A battle to hold onto *faith* that God will take care of us. We can be tempted to think that we need more of the things of this world to take care of our body, our spirit, and our ego. It can be a struggle to have faith that God is with us, and to know that when we have God we already have everything we need.

The three pillars of Lent are the antidotes to these temptations:

Prayer  $\leftrightarrow$  Glory: prayer draws us out of ourselves and our egos, helping us better relate to God

Fasting  $\leftrightarrow$  Bodily Pleasures: fasting helps us focus less on the food our body needs, and become more aware of the nourishment our spirit needs

Almsgiving  $\leftrightarrow$  Material Wealth: almsgiving lessens our attachments to things, giving us room to grow rich in what matters to God

So, that was a little prologue to today's homily. By calling to mind what we know from the other two Synoptic Gospels, we can be mindful of what's implied in the Gospel of Mark. But, returning our focus back to the Gospel of Mark, the Evangelist's brevity perhaps gives us an opportunity to take more notice of the other two readings from today's Mass. To see what they offer us in regards to beginning our Lenten journey.

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The image that is offered to us in each of these readings—the First Reading from Genesis, and the Second Reading from the First Letter of Saint Peter—is that of Noah and the Great Flood. The Flood might seem like a strange choice, as we often think of Lent as a time in a barren desert. But, let's take a look at what the Flood has to do with Lent.

First, what do we remember about the Flood? Well, let's recall the circumstances that led up to it:

When the LORD saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil, the LORD regretted making human beings on the earth, and his heart was grieved. So the LORD said: I will wipe out from the earth the human beings I have created, and not only the human beings, but also the animals and the crawling things and the birds of the air, for I regret that I made them.<sup>6</sup>

At first, this story seems to be one of God using water to punish, destroy, and “wipe out” His creation. Yet, as we learn from what happened to Noah and his family—and as we continue to read through salvation history—we see that God's ways are *always* directed toward finding some way to *save* life.

The Flood waters wiped out the wickedness that had spread—not only throughout the earth—but, that had also spread throughout human hearts. And yet, what do we see that emerged from the Flood? Not death. *Life!*

God sent a destructive Flood, but also made a way through the Flood for Noah and his family and, thus, for all the rest of us humans who have descended from Noah.<sup>7</sup> And so, we learn that what appears to us to be punishment and destruction is actually the means by which God saves and rebuilds.

We see that most clearly in the Cross. The Crucifixion of Jesus was the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Noah and every living creature.<sup>8</sup> And it showed us once and for all that when things seem totally lost to us—that is exactly when God is able to destroy death and bring out new and everlasting life.<sup>9</sup>

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Since the Flood, God has continued to use water as a means of destroying wickedness, and making a way for life to pass through safely, and for new life to emerge. Notably, we see this many generations later when the Israelites passed safely through the Red Sea—leaving behind slavery and onward to the freedom of the Promised Land.<sup>10</sup>

And, most notably—and even more relevant for each one of us today—just as God guided Noah and his family and the Israelites safely through the waters to new life—so has He done for each one of us when we passed through the waters of Baptism.<sup>11</sup> Lent is a season when we have brothers and sisters in our community who are in their final preparations for Baptism. Thus, by their example, this season becomes for us a time to recall what we have received in our own Baptism—or, for those still discerning the possibility of Baptism, a time to consider what is being freely offered to anyone through the waters of Baptism.

Tertullian, the Ancient Church Father (160-240), wrote that “the waters of the Flood...cleansed away the ancient iniquity and thus baptized the world.”<sup>12</sup> Just as we are forever changed by Baptism, the world was forever changed by the Flood. Furthermore, it can be said

that “baptism is the full realization of all that the Flood was, so that now baptism is the true Flood.”<sup>13</sup> Like the Flood, Baptism destroys wickedness—destroys Original Sin and what leads to death—and makes a safe way for us to freedom from wickedness and sin; a safe way for us to eternal life with God in Heaven.

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My friends, this is what Lent is to be for us. Yes, Lent is a 40-day journey through the desert. At the same time, it’s also a time for us to be flooded. Just as in the time of Noah when, for forty days, heavy rain poured down from the heavens onto the earth, each year in Lent we are given forty days of being flooded with grace from Heaven.<sup>14</sup>

Forty days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Forty days of self-denial. Forty days of conversion and turning back to God. Forty days of repenting and believing in the Gospel—the Good News that the purifying flood of God’s grace washes over us, destroys what is wicked in our hearts, and renews life in each one of us.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 4:1-11 (Year A); Mark 1:12-13 (Year B); Luke 4:1-13 (Year C)

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:12-13

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 4:3-4; Luke 4:3-4

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 4:5-7; Luke 4:9-12

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 4:8-10; Luke 4:5-8

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 6:5-7

<sup>7</sup> See 1 Peter 3:20: “... while God patiently waited in the days of Noah during the building of the ark, in which a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water.”

<sup>8</sup> See Genesis 9:9-17

<sup>9</sup> See 1 Peter 3:18: “For Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God. Put to death in the flesh, he was brought to life in the spirit.”

<sup>10</sup> See Exodus 14:21-30

<sup>11</sup> See 1 Peter 3:21-22: “This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. It is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.”

<sup>12</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism (De baptismo)* 8, cited by:

Adrien Nocent, “10. First Sunday of Lent (Year B): The Flood and the Covenant: Flood and Baptism” in *The Liturgical Year: Volume Two: Lent, The Sacred Paschal Triduum, Easter Time*, tr. by Matthew J. O’Connell, 118

<sup>13</sup> Nocent, 118

<sup>14</sup> See Genesis 7:12: “For forty days and forty nights heavy rain poured down on the earth.”

Note that “forty days” continues to be prominent in the Flood narrative:

See Genesis 7:17: “The flood continued upon the earth for forty days.”

See Genesis 8:6: “At the end of forty days Noah opened the hatch of the ark that he had made...”