

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The First Sunday of Lent—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

First Sunday of Lent

Reading 1

Gn 9:8-15

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:
"See, I am now establishing my covenant with you
and your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you:
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals
that were with you and came out of the ark.
I will establish my covenant with you,
that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed
by the waters of a flood;
there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth."
God added:
"This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come,
of the covenant between me and you
and every living creature with you:
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign
of the covenant between me and the earth.
When I bring clouds over the earth,
and the bow appears in the clouds,
I will recall the covenant I have made
between me and you and all living beings,
so that the waters shall never again become a flood
to destroy all mortal beings."

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9.

R. (cf. 10) **Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**
Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths,
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.
R. **Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.
R. **Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**

Good and upright is the LORD,
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and he teaches the humble his way.
R. **Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.**

Reading 2

1 Pt 3:18-22

Beloved:

Christ 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.
In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison,
who had once been disobedient
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.
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.

Verse Before the Gospel

Mt 4:4b

One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.

Gospel

Mk 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus 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.

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:
"This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel."

Exegesis

Gn 9:8-15

The flood is a sign of divine judgement: “Behold, I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life under heaven. All things that are in the earth shall be consumed.” (Gen 6:17) See also Gen 6:5-7; Gen 6:11-13; 2 Pet 2:5.

Our first reading from Genesis is God’s promise to us through Noah. It is God’s confirmation of, and commitment to maintain, his relationship with the natural order- implicit in the act of creation - whereby he promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood. This divine pledge, given unconditionally to Noah and to every living creature on earth, was accompanied by the sign of the rainbow.

The story of Noah is the story of salvation, a paradigm. God’s promise of salvation is always with us. It is up to us to respond to that invitation. Human hands built the Ark. The invitation was out to all. Some responded and some did not. God remains loyal to His promises forever. Salvation is a two-way street. Salvation is a gift, but a gift is not a gift until it is received. Until it is received it remains just an offer of salvation.

Ps 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9.

The way of Yahweh is the major theme of Psalm 25, i.e. Yahweh is love and compassion, kindness and goodness, and truth and justice. Those who keep the Covenant with Yahweh will experience His ways. To the humble He will teach His ways.

1 Pt 3:18-22

Scripture scholars have dated 1 Peter to the year 65, the same year that they believe that Peter was crucified. The background is the beginning of the persecution of Nero. The beautiful passage today has a creed-like tone to it. Our Apostles Creed tells us that Jesus descended into Hell. An early Creed states that He descended to the depth of Hell or the farthest regions of Hell. Our pericope supports that idea, “In it He also went to preach to the spirits in prison.” The idea is that Jesus traveled to the depth of God forsakenness to save us. St. Anselm once said, “That which is not assumed is not redeemed.” Jesus fully assumed our fallen human nature to save us. He is in deep solidarity with us. He allowed Himself to be separated from the Father’s love to the extent humanly possible to save us.

In one of his sermons, St. Augustine preached that Christ, in His divine pre-existence preached through Noah to the sinner of the flood. (Ser 164) The Ark prefigures baptism. The Church in the New Ark, the instrument of salvation.

Mk 1:12-15

Our Gospel passage today immediately follows the Baptism of Jesus. There is some very intense language and some powerful events unfolding. At the Baptism of Jesus, the Heavens were *rent* open, i.e. torn open. God’s Spirit was seen in the form of a dove descending upon Jesus. The voice of God was heard. Now the Spirit is driving Jesus into the wilderness for forty days. The *wilderness* recalls the place where Israel was “tested” for forty years. (Which is often taken as the background for the forty days and nights) and echoes the beginning of the Gospel (see 1:3-4). But the “forty-days” more likely alludes to the fast of Moses (Duet 9:18) in the wilderness of Sinai and that of Elijah near Mt. Horeb (see 1 Kgs 19:8).

The Greek word that is translated as *tempted* is *peirazō*. It is most often translated as *tested*. The word In Hebrew, the concept of testing is most commonly expressed with the verbs)ןבāhan, “to test”) and)ןנāsā, “to test”), whose range of meaning is similar. The sense of *bāhan* comes from the meaning of testing gold ([Job 23:10](#); [Zec 13:9](#)); *bāhan* is mainly used in reference to God testing people, as well as to people testing God. In Greek, the term that best corresponds with the Hebrew *bāhan* is δοκιμάζω (*dokimazō*, “to test”). The word *dokimazō* is also used in metaphors grounded in testing buildings ([1 Cor 3:13](#)) and precious metals ([1 Pet 1:7](#)) with fire. However, the most common term for testing in the NT is πειράζω (*peirazō*, “to try”), along with its related forms. The verb *peirazō* is used predominantly to express the testing of persons, including oneself (2 Cor 13:5). The rendering *tested* better evokes the theme of God’s testing the people of Israel and of the suffering just person, who though tested by God through suffering remains faithful rather than sin and is called a child of God (Wis 2:12-20 and 5:1-23).¹

Jesus turns from Satan and begins His public ministry. Mark clearly transitions between John the Baptist and Jesus. Our translation begins “After John had been arrested.” This could be translated “handed over.” It is the same wording that Mark uses for Jesus in the Passion Narrative. John proclaimed the way and the Kingdom of God coming. Now the Kingdom of God and the Way have arrived in the person of Jesus.

The first words of Jesus as He begins His ministry are substantially the same in all three synoptic Gospels. “This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel.” The word for time is *kairos*. The Greek word *cronos* speaks of time as we tend to think of time, i.e. chronological time. Unfortunately, there is no good English translation for *kairos*. It has a connotation of being the correct or proper time. The mystics of our tradition often spoke of profound experiences of God where time seemed to stand still. I think that this is *kairos* time. Theologians speak of God as being outside of time, *cronos* time. I would argue the God lives in *kairos* time, the eternal present, eternal being.

The Kingdom of God in Mark and throughout the Gospels holds a tension between the present and the future. It is present now in Jesus and is evolving here on earth. In the parables Jesus often puts us as a part of the process of this evolution. Yet, at the same time this Kingdom is already fulfilled and awaits all who accept the Gospel, i.e. repent, and believe. It is best to look at the Kingdom through God’s perspective, in *kairos* time. In any event, the Kingdom of God is now at hand in Jesus.

Jesus is immediately calling us to repentance and faith. (For a discussion on (*metanoia* see exegesis on Jonah Third Sunday of Ordinary Time B) Jesus is calling us to believe in the Good News. We often equate faith with an intellectual ascent of the mind, articulated in the creed that we pray. The underlying word is *pistis* and is used throughout Sacred Scripture. It is translated as faith or belief or saving faith as in the miracle stories. The word generally suggests not simply intellectual conviction but also trust and personal commitment often with an orientation toward a threatening future. As I reflect on the word, especially as it plays out in the Gospel of John, it seems to me that at its deepest level, faith is about opening ourselves to the indwelling Spirit of God. It is this oneness with God that is the goal of *metanoia*.

1. Sacra Pagina, The Gospel of Mark, Donahue-Harrington, M.G., Page 66.

Reflection – Personal Witness

I love the change of seasons here in God's Country, i.e. the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Right now, I love even more the thought of spring coming sooner rather than later. Did you know that the word Lent comes from the Latin word *lentus* which means *spring*, as in the season that we now long for? Spring is a time of transition between winter and summer. Cold turns to warmth and darkness turns to light. In fact, all of nature seems to come back to life as the trees and plants start to bud and buds turn to leaves and flowers and grass spring from the earth. Think spring!

The Season of Lent is in fact a time of transition. It is a time to journey with Jesus from the desert to hill of Calvary and the cross of Good Friday. It is a time to die with Jesus and to enter into the darkness of the tomb. From the vantage point of the tomb, we are then able to look out to the bright light of Easter dawn. It is a time to walk with Jesus to the Father. Recall the words of Jesus, "Father may they be one as You and I are one."

The first reading of Lent from the Prophet Joel challenges us to rend our hearts open, to begin a journey within our own hearts. The purpose of the journey is to discover God who is already there waiting for us. The Gospel invites us to go into that "inner room." Often that journey is a difficult one. It is difficult because of the protective shield that we build around our hearts over time. It is what scripture calls the hardness of heart. It is something that Jesus experienced in people and talked about often.

With that hardness comes apathy and a level of indifference that is striking. Pope Francis in his Lenten message a few years ago called for a break in what he referred to as a globalization of indifference. It seems that the entire world has developed a hardened heart. We have become desensitized by constant hate speech and senseless violence.

If we do manage to break through the barrier of our hearts, we often discover a clutter that we did not realize existed. A little house cleaning then becomes necessary. Lent is a time to do that "house" cleaning. We need to get rid of all the stuff that becomes an obstacle to our relationship with God. Sometimes it is areas of sin that separates us from God. Most often I think that it is simply a preoccupation with the mundane of everyday life. Lent is a time to pause and reflect on our spiritual health, to assess our relationship with Jesus.

I pray that this Lent will be a wonderful spiritual experience for all of you. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Jesus and Mother Mary,

