

Homily. 1st Sunday in Lent. Year. B. 20/21 February 2021.

Noah, along with a few people and a selection of birds and animals, were chosen by God to enter the Ark and survive the great flood. The Ark was designed by God and built by Noah and his family under God's direction. This micro-world of people and creatures floated for 40 days and nights across the turbulent, destructive waters until dry land appeared. In the Ark they were safe and they were saved by it so as to begin again after human arrogance and pride had been washed away in the mighty waters. After this cleansing time God made a covenant, an agreement, signified by the rainbow never again to destroy all life by a global flood.

The reading from the 1st Letter of St. Peter compares the story of Noah to our Baptism into Christ. As they were saved in the Ark from the deadly waters and by the water allowed to begin afresh, so we are saved through our Baptismal waters, entering into new life in the Risen Christ. This is our re-birth into the new covenant, not that of a rainbow but that of the mercy and forgiveness won for us by Christ's loving self-giving death and resurrection for our salvation and for that of the whole world.

After His own Baptism by John in the River Jordan, Jesus went into the Judaeian wilderness for prayer and fasting, temptation and discernment. St. Mark, unlike Sts. Matthew and Luke, gives us no details of this time of struggle and choice. All that he says is that Jesus was alone in this desert wilderness for 40 days and nights being tempted by the adversary, Satan. He was surrounded by wild beasts and looked after by the Angels. Some like to hear the details of Satan's tricks, but by leaving the story stark and bare Mark lets us imagine this testing time for ourselves, finding

hints and echos of our own struggles and temptations in those that Jesus endured. We know that Jesus saw through the lies and tricks of the enemy, Satan, because when His testing-time ended He commenced His ministry, calling people to repentance, God's mercy and the new way of the Good-News.

All of this serves as an example, a model and pattern for our Lenten Season, this 40 day journey of renewal in faith. By our efforts of prayer and reflection, fasting and sacrifice, generosity and service we confront the lies, misdirection and sins that have drawn us away from the waters of our Baptism and new-life covenant into the murky flood waters of selfishness and death. The choices that we make for ourselves over these coming weeks will help us refine and purify our way of living. We know that on this journey we will be safe and saved by Jesus at our side, protecting us from the lies and tricks of Satan and the wild devouring beasts of our self-absorption and self-destruction.

Like Noah and his Ark of new beginnings we will come to rest on the safe land of Easter joy more whole and holy than we are now. Our minds will be clearer and our spirits refreshed, ready to celebrate together the Pascal Mystery, the heart of our faith, hope and love. The ship has been launched and we are on board: Our Lenten journey has begun and we have left the past behind us. We seek only what will be, discovering the place where God is waiting, heart wide open to welcome us home.