

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent  
February 21, 2021  
“Outside of the Norm”

Gen 9:8-15  
1 Pt 3:18-21  
Mk 1:12-15

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

Most of us who have lived very long have experienced some kind of inner suggestion to do something outside the norm. Perhaps it is just a hunch or interior feeling – But it could also be as strong as a kind of compulsion. Moreover, it could be something that most people would not do or even expect us to do – or to refrain from doing.

I’m speaking of a sense of urgency that surprises us. It might even be a warning to avoid something. In any event, if we followed it, there usually was a reward, a benefit – or at least a sense of personal satisfaction of some kind. However, if we did not follow what we sensed, then we missed out on something positive – or even experienced a negative impact, if the suggestion was a warning!

How did Noah come to understand that he should build an ark when there was no sign of an impending deluge? What compelled him to do so, when he was ridiculed by his contemporaries? Somehow, the Spirit of God was working within Noah, and he listened to the Spirit’s intimations. Noah hoped to get others to see the sinfulness in their hearts and lives – Yet, they failed to repent and change, and so they experienced a devastating flood as a result!

Today, the Book of Genesis tells us that God made a Covenant with us ages ago – God would never destroy the world by complete inundation. Moreover, the sign of that Covenant would be the rainbow that sometimes comes after a storm. That full spectrum of color would remind us that God truly loves us and has a place for us. As sunlight on distant raindrops present a magnificent arch in the sky, so, too, does God’s grace interact with our humanity for our ultimate salvation!

In the Gospel passage, St. Mark tells us that Jesus was driven into the wilderness. In doing so, Jesus did something totally outside the norm. No one went into the desert alone, with no experience beforehand. But God had to prepare Jesus for the ministry that lay ahead. Consequently, not only did Jesus have to struggle for physical survival, he also had to contend with satan and not be overcome!

During those 40 days, Jesus was like Moses and Elijah. Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai, receiving the Commandments of God – And Elijah was in flight for forty days, across the desert from those who would kill him, until he met God on Mt. Horeb.

When Moses came off the mountain, he gave the Chosen People the Commandments by which they should live. When Elijah left Horeb, he had a new direction for his life. And when Jesus came out of the wilderness, he began to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Jesus also proclaimed the absolute necessity to repent and believe in the New Covenant that the Father sent him to inaugurate!

In the New Testament reading, St. Peter teaches us that we are incorporated into this New Covenant of the Kingdom of God with our baptism. Baptism is not a washing of physical dirt and grime. With Baptismal water, the Holy Spirit washes sin away and infuses us with divine light and love. Like the rainbow of water and invisible sunlight, Baptism transforms us by its water and the invisible Spirit of God. Our former sins are washed away – and we become more than what we were before.

We now have a destiny and a promise. And, henceforth, we must truly live as disciples – faithful to God’s Covenant, faithful to God’s commands, and faithful to the Gospel way of Jesus. We must also become responsive to the intimations, the suggestions, the compulsions, the driving force – of the Holy Spirit! We must become all that we are as children of God and brothers and sisters of Jesus. We must be and do all that we are in whatever vocation, job, or life-situation we live each day!

Brothers and Sisters, God has, indeed, gifted us with our personal creation and our destiny in a future kingdom of bliss. That we must live in the wilderness – the desert of our life here for 20, 40, 60, 80 or more years – is of no consequence. What matters is that we always live as grateful sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. Satan will be there to tempt us. But God’s angels will also be there to assist us. Moreover, the Holy Spirit leads us, guides us, and even drives us. The occasional rainbow will remind us that God’s Covenant with us is everlasting.

May we always be grateful for all that God is for us!

Amen.

February 21, 2021

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