

## 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

Gen 9:8-15; 1 Pet 3:18-22; Mk 1:12-15

The primary purpose of Lent is to prepare us for the celebration of Jesus' death and Resurrection. The Church tries to achieve this goal by leading her children to *metanoia* or true "*repentance*" through the reordering of our priorities and the changing of our values, ideals and ambitions, through fasting, prayer and self-control. Since by Baptism, we share the death and Resurrection of Jesus, today's readings refer to Baptism directly or indirectly. Lenten observances are also intended to lead us to our annual solemn renewal of Baptismal vows on Holy Saturday. Through Baptism, we are called to live justly, to love God with all our being, to love our neighbor as ourselves, and to build the kingdom of God by our acts of charity.

Today's first reading tells us that Noah's rescue from the flood symbolizes how we are saved through the water of Baptism which cleanses us of sin and makes us one with Christ. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 25) is a perfect penitential prayer, humbly acknowledging human insufficiency and our radical dependence upon God's mercy and forgiveness. The psalmist lists some of the characteristics of the life of the forgiven penitent: truth, compassion, love, kindness, goodness, uprightness, humility and justice.

In the second reading, St. Peter shows us that as Noah and his family were saved from the flood, we are also saved through the waters of Baptism. Baptism is an outward sign of the New Covenant that God made with his people. Baptism not only removes Original Sin and also makes us adopted children of God, heirs of Heaven, and temples of the Holy Spirit. The waters of Baptism on the other hand are the cleansing agent that saves all.

*Let us make Lent a time of renewal of life by penance and prayer:* Lent is the season of self-examination. Formerly the six weeks of Lent meant a time of severe penance as a way of purifying ourselves from our sinful habits and getting ready to celebrate the *Paschal Mystery* (the passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ), with a renewed commitment

to follow Christ. Now the Church leaves the Lenten practice of penance to the good will and generosity of individual Christians. However, Lent should be a time for personal reflection, where we stand as Christians in accepting the Gospel challenges in thought, word and deed. It is also a time to assess our relationships with our family, friends, working colleagues and other people we come in contact with us, especially those of our parish. We should examine whether we are able to give any positive contribution to other people's lives and to eradicate the abuses which are part of our society.

*Let us defeat our temptations as Jesus did, using the methods Jesus employed:* Jesus defeated his tempter, the devil by prayer, penance and timely use of the word of God. Hence, during this Lent, let us confront our evil practices by talking to God, by listening to Him, who speaks to us through the Holy Bible and by practicing self- control.

*Let us convert Lent into a time for spiritual growth and Christian maturity by:* a) participating in the Mass each day or at least a few days in the week; b) by setting aside some part of our day for personal prayer; c) by reading some Scripture, alone or, better still, with others; d) by setting aside some money that we might spend on ourselves for meals, entertainment or clothes and giving it to an organization which takes care of the less fortunate in our society; e) by abstaining from smoking or alcohol; f) by receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation in Lent and participating in the "Stations of the Cross" on Fridays; g) by visiting the sick and those in nursing homes and doing some acts of charity, kindness and mercy every day in the Lent.

*Let us use Lent as a time to fight against the evil within us and around us:* Repenting and fighting against temptations and evil is a lifetime's task. Jesus did not overcome Satan in the wilderness; but He achieved that only in His death on the cross. Lent reminds us that we have to take up the fight each day against the evil within us and around us, and never give up. Jesus has given the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with us, empowering us so that final victory will be ours through Jesus Christ.