

Commentary on the Readings for February 18, 2024

The First Sunday of Lent

The **First Reading** is from the *Book of Genesis (9:8-15)*. The story of **Noah and the Ark** is a legend shared by all people of the ancient Middle Eastern nations. Whether it happened or not is not really important; it is the message that counts. The ancient Jews looked upon this story as a sign that God does punish sinful people and protects the faithful and that He is full of mercy and His love is eternal. At least we know that the part of the story is true — the rainbow shines on all of us occasionally.

The **Responsorial Psalm (25:4-9)** is a prayer that we all need to say frequently as a reminder of God's eternal mercy. It is a prayer that Noah could have prayed sincerely and we should take our cue from him and do the same.

The **Second Reading** is from the *First Letter of St. Peter (3:18-22)*. There is no doubt about the truth or validity of the message in this passage from St. Peter. Our first pope speaks from the heart and from personal experience when he says: "Christ suffered for sinners, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might lead you to the Father," and also, that the story of Noah and his family "prefigured baptism which saves us now." Lent is good time to rethink our baptismal commitment, which is, as Peter says, "an appeal to God for a clear conscience."

The **Gospel Reading** is taken from the *Gospel of Mark (1:12-15)*. This passage describes Jesus' retreat into the desert shortly after having been baptized (which we discussed a few weeks ago). For Him, it was a time for reflecting upon the mission He was about to begin, that of preaching and teaching about the *Kingdom of God*. As with baptism, Jesus did not "need to be tempted," but He was also human and the forces of evil would have rejoiced if they could get Jesus to fall to their promises. However, Jesus was "filled with the Holy Spirit" and resisted the temptations of grandeur and power.

The season of Lent is patterned after this time of Jesus in the desert. It is meant as a time for us to reflect upon our participation in the *Kingdom, the Church* and its teachings. It is also a time for us to review our spiritual life and the faith that supports it. So, we might begin by asking ourselves, "What one thing in my spiritual life or my daily human life needs improvement for the benefit of everyone?" Then we have six weeks to work on that one thing. Something to think about during your prayer time this week!

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