

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #23

READING I Genesis 9:8-15

A reading from the Book of Genesis

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."

Genesis = JEN-uh-shins

This is a familiar story. Your proclamation helps others hear it anew. Pause after the narrator announces God will speak, giving the listeners time to prepare for God's words.

God's word is amplified with a physical sign. Hear me and see my promise.

bow = boh

God's covenant is not just with humans but with all of creation. Ecological concerns are not a new issue. God has provided for creation from the beginning.

READING I

This reading—the first of three exploring baptismal imagery—comes from the end of the flood account in Genesis where God establishes the first unequivocal covenant (*berit* in Hebrew) with humanity. Covenants establish deep bonds between/among the parties that enter into them, and they always consist of explicit terms (usually behavior based) that benefit all parties involved. In most cases, signs or symbolic actions establish the covenant and/or remind participants of the covenant in the future. The covenant of Christian marriage, for exam-

ple, is established in the sacramental celebration of matrimony and is recalled in the sign of wedding rings worn by the couple. In the case of the biblical flood, God anticipates the covenant made in today's reading before the flood with a promise to protect Noah, his descendants, and all living things on the earth, as well as every promised covenant. Noah remains faithful to God's commands (Genesis 6:22) by building and filling the ark. Today's first reading then demonstrates God's faithfulness through the establishment of the foretold

covenant. Noah, his descendants, and every living thing on the earth will never again be subject to a global flood. Moreover, and notably, only God's actions are restricted by the terms of this covenant, despite the fact that humanity's sins wrought the flood (Genesis 6:5-8). It is thus possible to see in today's first reading a type or precursor of baptism in which, through water, God restricts the divine power to enact justice in order to show forth the divine power to extend mercy to sinners in need of forgiveness.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 (10)

R. Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.
 In your kindness remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.
 Good and upright is the Lord, thus he shows sinners the way.
 He guides the humble to justice, and your love are from of old.

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.
 Remember that your compassion, O Lord, and your love are from of old.

First Peter is rarely used during Year B. Announce the book distinctly.

The Spirit that animates Jesus animates us.

Read "patiently" slowly.

Read through to the end with energy. God's majesty is on display.

READING II 1 Peter 3:18-22

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

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.

READING II

This passage from Peter's first letter explores baptismal imagery by interpreting the Noah story in light of Christ's paschal mystery. The passage speaks of Jesus' descent to the realm of the dead and his proclamation of the Gospel to all those who died before his incarnation. This preaching in the realm of the dead, for Peter, was a manifestation of God's patience toward those who were disobedient in prior generations, especially the generation of Noah. Peter then extends the connection he makes between Noah and Christ's saving activity to baptism—

GOSPEL

another washing with water that, although it is experienced outwardly as a washing, has an internal aim of cleansing and reconciling our consciences. Similar to the way that the flood called for God to be patient while Noah completed and filled the ark, so baptism calls for God to be patient with us as we journey either toward forgiveness of sins in baptism (as the elect do during Lenten season) or toward a deeper realization of our baptismal call to conversion (as baptized Christians do in their reception of reconciliation this Lent). Thus, for Peter, baptism is an act of inquiry, a polite but strenuous appeal to God imploring patient mercy. And, knowing of God's faithfulness and patient mercy in the covenant forged with Noah, we have assurance that our appeal to the Lord for mercy in the sacraments of forgiveness (baptism and penance) will be fulfilled.

Mark's Gospel passage today is characteristically short, swift, and action-packed. Just after his baptism, Jesus is driven by the Spirit into the wilderness. This connects Jesus' baptism (and ours) with a purpose-filled

GOSPEL Mark 1:12-15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

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."

Pause after "beasts." It will contrast with "angels." Pause for the scene change. Don't rush through John's plight. Read Jesus' words with energy and convey immediacy. Pause after "repent," which helps emphasize "gospel."

ing out the promised land (Numbers 13-14), kingdom; it is at hand in Jesus. Finally, this new age and the closeness of God's kingdom call for a two-fold response: repentance and belief. Still today, Jesus transforms our present place and time to call us to respond accordingly with acts of repentance and belief. E.W.

mission. He does not remain on the shores of the Jordan but goes immediately to the wilderness to contend with Satan's temptations. Mark does not mention the nature or number of those temptations. Rather, he highlights the length of Jesus' stay—forty days—and the inhabitants Jesus encounters—wild beasts and angels. These subtle cues highlight Jesus' triumphant inversion of the meaning and power of wilderness elements. First, the nature of our temporal age has changed. Jesus' coming means we live in a time of fulfillment rather than a time of promise. Second, the fulfillment of our age is marked by the proximity of God's