

1st Sunday of Lent 2015 Cycle B

First Reading: Genesis 9:8-15 [*The rainbow as a sign of the covenant between God and the earth*]

Responsorial Psalm: Ps. 25 "Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant."

Second Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-20 [*The waters of the flood prefigured the baptism which saves us.*]

Gospel: Mark 1:12-15 [*Jesus was tempted by the devil, & afterwards proclaimed the Gospel of God.*]

♪ BE WITH ME LORD, WHEN I AM IN TROUBLE, BE WITH, ME LORD I PRAY

Those who cling to the Lord live secure in God's love, lifted high those who trust in God's name.
Call on the Lord, who will never forsake you, God will bring you salvation and joy. ♪

These words reflect the longing and the trust of the prayer Jesus prayed in the desert. The verses are from Ps 91. Jesus would know that prayer well, since the Psalms were his prayer book.

In the Gospel today, we see him putting his trust in God, his Father, even though his hunger and thirst make him vulnerable to temptation. He believed that his Father would never leave him, and would give him the strength and wisdom he needed to face temptation and pain.

There is a wonderful acronym I learned from 12 step groups, the letters are H -A- L -T, and they stand for **Hungry, Angry, Lonely and Tired**. Whenever I am any of those, I am a target for temptation. Jesus was not only *hungry*, he was *angry* at the devil for quoting the Bible to trick him. He was *alone* in the desert, & *tired* from his fast and the heat.

The devil confronted Jesus with the values of the world, values that still infect *our* world. The temptations were really about **control**. Every temptation is somehow about getting *control over God* rather than *turning to God*. We sometimes act as if we can turn God on and off the way we use a remote control to turn on the TV and other electronic devices.

Today's Gospel ends with "*Repent, and believe in the Gospel.*" The word translated as "Repent" is "shuv" in Hebrew. It has a very physical meaning in the culture of those who first heard Jesus preach. It means to physically turn around, to turn towards God and away from anything that rejects what God calls us to. Jesus is calling his hearers to turn to the Gospel, which is the Good News that God loves us, forgives us and blesses us with peace.

Today we see how Jesus responded to temptation. He did not run away from the difficult times in his life, from the times he was in the desert. He received what he needed from the Father. He was guided and supported by the Spirit.

He then began to proclaim the Gospel, the Good News of God, by his words and his life: *This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is right here among you. Repent, turn to God when you are in trouble and believe in the Gospel.*

Jesus calls the people of his time, and of ours to believe the good news that God is bigger than the power of nations, the fire of human hatred, the pain of grief; bigger than the chaos caused by flood or fire or wind or snow; bigger than the coldness of greed or the lies of oppressors.

Like Jesus, we are tempted. We are tempted to make a god of comfort and security. Some are tempted to destroy the land, the water, the air and plant and animal life so they can fatten their bank accounts and eat more than is good for them.

The word of God that Jesus knew and lived calls us to care for the earth the way God cares for the earth. In the first reading, we hear several times that God makes a covenant with *all creation*, not just with human beings.

We are *tempted* to believe the gospel of greed that is preached by so much of our culture. That message makes it too easy to ignore the hungry and the poor, to use other people to get what we want, and to close our eyes to how the wealth of a few denies food & medicine to many. We are *tempted* to make a god out of our own ego, that small part of our self that cries out to be the center of the universe.

When we pray the Our Father, we say the words, "Lead us not into temptation." Did you ever wonder what that means? It might sound like we're trying to use the remote control on God, to keep God from tempting us; or even that we are afraid that the Lord will lead us into temptation. But that is an image of a God who is trying to trick us. That's not the God revealed by Jesus.

The letter of James says, "God does not tempt anybody." (Jas 1:13). The concept translated into Shakespearian English as "*lead us not into temptation*" is a little different in the original Aramaic and Greek of the New Testament. *The original languages mean both "do not allow us to enter into temptation" and "do not let us yield to temptation."* That is the explanation given in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

The Spanish version prayed by the Latin American Church is much closer to the original language Jesus used. In that language, the words are, "*no nos dejes caer en la tentacion*, which means, "Don't let us fall into temptation". That makes more sense to me - it's more like the song we sang, "Be with me Lord, when I am in trouble."

In the rest of the Bible, and especially in the teaching of Jesus, God is not the one who tempts us. God is the one who sends angels and even works through the animals who are with Jesus. When we pray that part of the Our Father, we are really praying to be able to respond to temptation the way Jesus did.

When there is damage caused by blizzards, wind, or flooding, some insurance companies called it an act of God. But there is another way to look at it. Blizzards, Hurricanes and floods are acts of *nature*, -- the generous response and the work of recovery are the real acts of God.

In 2011, I had to leave the house I had been living in since 1995 because of the damage done by Hurricane Irene. Unlike Noah, I did not take the animals [the many puppets we used for ministry] with me in the Subaru which I drove through water almost a foot deep to rescue Sr. Anna. The water and mud rose to 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet in the double wide mobile home I had been renting.

After 2 ½ years of “camping” [living in temporary residences], I realized that I was not going to get back into the place which had been our ministry center and my residence, even though it was being slowly renovated. I felt frustrated by that fact, but I have been blessed by the places I was able to stay since then, and even more by the people who helped me move into a new apartment a year ago, one that is better suited to my life and our ministry. Those events & people were the “messengers of God” along with the people who “adopted” new puppets by giving us what we needed to buy them from a local merchant.

Those events recalled a lesson I am still learning - that the Lord sends me what I need when I trust, even if it is not what I think I need, and that I am not in control of the process.

There’s another verse from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians that reads, “You can trust God not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trial he will give you a way out of it and the strength to bear it.” (1Cor 10:13).

The Good News of today’s Scripture is that Abba, our Father, will give us what we need to get through whatever crisis or temptation we experience, just like he got Jesus through his time in the desert, and got Noah through the flood.

As Lent begins, even when we face difficult times or temptations, the Lord asks each of us: How can we respond as disciples of Christ?

Once while standing at a peace vigil, I saw a young man with a sign that said, “What would Jesus do” and on the other side, “What would Jesus want *me* to do?” The reading from the letter of Peter reminds us that Christ will never abandon us. Our baptism is a sacrament of his covenant promise and a challenge to always ask ourselves, “What would Jesus want *me* to do?”

This song - which I sang on Ash Wednesday - is a description of what Jesus wants us to do.

♪ Return to God with all your heart, the source of grace and mercy;

 Come seek the tender faithfulness of God. ♪