



Gospel Reflection

Unlike the accounts given by Matthew & Luke, Mark gives us very few details of Jesus' time in the wilderness. But we must pay attention to what he tells us. Notice: Jesus's 40 days in the wilderness takes place immediately after his baptism when *'Heaven was torn open. The Spirit, like a dove descended on him. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*' (Mark 1:11)

It is the same Spirit who now drives Jesus into the wilderness and there he confronts Satan. This is symbolised by the 'wild beasts' roaming around Jesus. The scene conjures up darkness, anarchy, danger, fear, but all the time the *'angels looked after him'*. In a few words, Mark presents a victorious and conquering Lord, who has confronted and has overcome the evil one.

It is only because of this that Jesus, the beloved of the Father, filled with the Spirit, can now begin his ministry announcing the end of Satan, the beginning of God's reign. *"The time has come, the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News."*

Let us learn from the Gospel. May we see Lent as a time when we are deeply loved by God; when the 'angels look after' and guide us. May we feel the Father's secure embrace in all our trials. May we love him in our prayer. May we seek him in our neighbour.

Prayer over the Offerings

Give us the right dispositions, O Lord, we pray, to make these offerings,
for with them we celebrate the beginning of this
venerable and sacred time.

Prayer after Communion

Renewed now with heavenly bread, by which faith is nourished, hope increased, and charity strengthened, we pray, O Lord, that we may learn to hunger for Christ, the true and living Bread, and strive to live by every word which proceeds from your mouth

First Sunday of Lent **18th February 2024**



On the First Sunday of Lent every year, we listen to the account of Jesus' 40 days in the wilderness, and it very much introduces & forms the model of our annual Lenten journey.

*"By abstaining forty long days from earthly food,
he consecrated through his fast
the pattern of our Lenten observance
and, by overturning all the snares of the ancient serpent,
taught us to cast out the leaven of malice,
so that, celebrating worthily the Paschal Mystery,
we might pass over at last to the eternal paschal feast."*

Preface for the First Sunday of Lent

Opening Prayer

Grant, almighty God, through the yearly observances of holy Lent, that we may grow in understanding of the riches hidden in Christ and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.

Genesis 9:8-15

God spoke to Noah and his sons, 'See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again.'

God said, 'Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind. And so the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh.'

The first 11 chapters of Genesis, of which today's passage is part, is not meant to be a scientific explanation of the beginnings of life, but rather an expression of fundamental beliefs. Using imaginative language the author teaches that God is creator of all things, and that man & woman who were destined to enjoy the friendship of God, rebelled and incurred God's anger. However, today's short except, which tells of God entering into covenant with Noah after the flood, emphasises that in spite of our waywardness, God never abandons us, his creation.

This Lent, may we renew our efforts to look to God for life.

Psalm 24(25):4-6,7b-9

*Lord, make me know your ways. Lord, teach me your paths.
Make me walk in your truth, and teach me: for you are God my saviour.
Remember your mercy, Lord, and the love you have shown from of old.
In your love remember me, because of your goodness, O Lord.
The Lord is good and upright, He shows the path to those who stray,
He guides the humble in the right path, He teaches his way to the poor.*

Peter 3:18-22

Christ himself, innocent though he was, died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people 'by water', and when God was still waiting patiently, that these spirits refused to believe. That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand, now that he has made the angels and Dominations and Powers his subjects.

Today's Second Reading is attributed to the Apostle Peter, so is dated before 64 AD (year of his death). Rather than a letter, it is more like a sermon which is addressed to persecuted Christians, but which draws on material used during baptisms, which took place at the Easter vigil. As the waters of the flood cleansed the earth of sinners, so the waters of baptism, the blood of Christ, washes away our sins. Through Prayer, fasting and Charity, Lent is a time when we prepare to renew our baptismal promises at the Easter Celebration – turning from sin, moving closer to the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

*Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.*

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory!

Mark 1:12-15

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him.

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. 'The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'