

18th February 2018 (First Sunday in Lent, Year B)

Genesis 9:8-15; Psalm 24(25):4-6,7b-9; 1Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1: 12-15.

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness.

The scripture readings on this first Sunday in Lent expose us to a number of different images. The first reading reminds us of the flood at the time of Noah; in the second reading Peter reminds us of our Baptism; while in the gospel we hear about the wilderness, wild beasts and angels, and the need to repent.

Lent is an invitation for us to open our lives once again to God. At the time of Noah, those who were open to listen to and obey God's word, joined Noah in the ark; the water that brought destruction to many, brought salvation to those in the ark! The water of the flood was at the same time death and new life!

Peter tells us that the water of the flood is an early symbol of our Baptism when we are invited to walk through the water (seen especially when Baptism is performed by full immersion) and we die with Christ in order to rise again in him. Easter is a time when we renew our baptismal vows, and Lent is the time when we prepare ourselves for this renewal.

In our Baptism we promised to live the life of Christ, rejecting Satan and sin and believing in God – Father, Son and Spirit. We know that we do not always live by this promise; many times in our life we turn away from God and prefer other gods. Jesus invites us to repent and to commit ourselves once again to the Good News, because the kingdom of God is here; the kingdom of God is with us!

In the gospel passage we hear that the Spirit of God, that had descended upon Jesus at his Baptism, drove him out to the wilderness where he was tested. This is a very interesting concept to work with; even when we are in our own wilderness, and we feel that our faith is being tested, the Spirit of God is still with us and does not abandon us! We are living through a difficult time when we experience our Church going through a very rough time. Some have expressed the feeling that it seems as if the boat of the Church is in stormy waters, facing strong head winds, and water is fast coming into the boat!

This is our wilderness; this is the time when our faith is being tested. With Peter we need to ask: how strong is my faith? Some may feel the water is too rough for their liking, and choose to jump ship and find another boat, or swim back to shore on their own. As we start another season of Lent we need to hear Jesus calling us once again to focus back on him. He is God! The invitation is for us to repent and make space once again for God in our daily life. Even if we are battling strong winds, we need to remind ourselves that God will never leave us alone, he is with us even when we are in the wilderness among wild beasts!

This Good News needs to inform us and sustain us during the journey of Lent and during our whole life. Let us continuously remind ourselves that the kingdom of God is here with us, Emmanu-el, God with us!

Fr Mario