

1st Sunday of Lent: Gen 9:8-15. 1 Pt 3:18-22. Mk 1:12-15.

MEDITATION:

The Gospel this Sunday tells of the temptations of Jesus for forty days in the desert. The time of lent comes from that.

This year, the Gospel of Mark is brief, but the other Gospels go into more detail. I like the way that Jesus replies to Satan in Mathew 4. He doesn't enter into discussion but simply quotes scripture giving a clear response. You could say that he 'kicked the devil in the backside' or 'shut him up', and there's just no arguing back. Unfortunately the 'devil' in each one of us is well able to answer us ourselves back! Maybe we could all quote scripture, like Jesus in Mathew 4, but the big difference is that Jesus was totally faithful in putting it into practice.

The Gospel of Mathew says that Jesus was 'led' by the Spirit into the desert, and was there 'tempted' by the devil (Mt 4:1), and the verbs used 'to lead' and 'to tempt' are actually linked. In other words, the fact that Jesus had to face up to challenges was part of God's plan. It wasn't into a pleasant oasis that Jesus was led! That's asking us to face up to lent as a healthy challenge, and to face up to the challenges as part of our lives at all times.

Being faithful to God brings challenges, but Jesus himself leads the way. Lent reminds me of rugby training! I write this from my wheelchair! A good trainer gets his players to train hard, and often it's no fun for them, but it's great fun if they end up playing a good game. The trainer may shout instructions from the sidelines as players run around, but it's even better if he goes through the struggle of training along with them. Jesus certainly goes through the struggle with us - ahead of us. That's so that his Easter victory can be ours also.

The first reading is about Noah's victory over the flood. The water of the flood actually symbolises baptism (baptism at the time of John involved ducking completely underwater in the river Jordan). The ark made of wood symbolises the cross of Jesus that saves us. The rainbow is simply a nice colourful result of the refraction of sunlight, but the reading describes it as a little sign to remind God of the decision not to destroy mankind. I don't think that the Trinity need reminders, but we do! The Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the desert, and the Spirit applauds after his baptism in the Gospels, and Jesus said that the baptism of each of us unlocks the door for us to eternal life. That's relevant for us who were Baptised at some stage. In the ancient world, when people decided that they would like to join that strange bunch called Christians, they weren't baptised at once, but they went through a time of preparation called the 'catechumenate'. Baptism would be at Easter. On the first Sunday of lent was celebrated the Rite of Election of catechumens. Lent then was a time of preparation. John the Baptist is mentioned this Sunday, and Jesus takes up where John left off - "repent and believe" - as in "give up your aul sins"!

As the Gospel this Sunday recalls, it was precisely after the victory over the tempter in the desert, that John the Baptist was arrested. John represents the whole of the Old Testament, and he is like a finger pointing to the New. The little sprinkle at the baptismal font in the church is far from the Jordan river of 2,000 years ago, and it may seem

unimportant, but it actually represents how mankind can now rise from death and from the way that temptations try to drown the love of Christ in us. So let's make this Lent a time to begin the New in us - to renew our determination to reject evil and to choose Christ.

At every mass, we are remembering that Jesus died a very bloody death, giving up his flesh and blood, and that sounds like an ugly horror story, but the second reading of Peter reminds us that Jesus was brought to life in the Spirit, and thereby the Gospel really became Good News. And it says that that prefigured baptism, and we've been baptised. Yahooooo!

But will you enter through that door of Life after death? It may involve resisting temptations and making of your life a clear option for following Christ. The path has curves, but Resurrection will come!

Lent will be a time to examine ourselves. I don't like looking at myself in the mirror, but it's good to look sometimes to see if there are any stains on my face... and then clean them off!

..... Dara.