

1st Sunday of Lent Year B February 18, 2018

There's an old joke about the young man who went to Confession and said he had been experiencing temptations.

"Well did you entertain them, my son?" asked the kind priest.

"No, Father," replied the somewhat confused man, "but they sure entertained me!"

"Being Tempted" might be for some a quaint idea, from an outdated time period.

But temptation is real for all of us, even for Jesus, as Mark writes in today's Gospel.

Before beginning his public ministry, Jesus was led by God's Spirit into the desert. There He was tempted by Satan for 40 days.

As this period in the life of Jesus shows, being tempted isn't a sin; In fact, it can be a spiritual opportunity.

Perhaps the desert experience and all the temptations of Satan helped to clarify Jesus' mission and to deepen his reliance on his Father.

Some of you began your spiritual education about temptations and other matters of faith, with stories from the Bible. I know that was part of my early education in Catholic school.

The story of Noah and the flood is one of the most well-known.

I recall a few years ago when Dinah and I, and some others from the parish, went up to Lancaster PA to the Sights and Sounds Theater, where we saw this epic tale play out live on a large stage with, music, songs, very real sounding thunder and lighting, and live animals.

All of the drama of Noah and the Ark overshadow perhaps, what should be the most powerful moment in the story: the part we heard today in our First Reading – God’s Covenant with Noah and his descendants.

Scripture tells us this covenant is a free promise on God’s part. It does not depend on our response and we do nothing to deserve this promise – A promise of God’s unending love and concern for each one of us.

All of creation is given a new beginning, a new opportunity to live in the harmony that God intended.

The promise made to Noah, Abraham, then to Moses, and to all the prophets, and kings, is a covenant fulfilled and made new, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And what is the symbol of God’s covenant – a rainbow, a beautiful heavenly sign that the ancients took to mean that God’s weapons had been put aside. This is a God of love; never will God be our adversary.

In our Second Reading, with the story of Noah as background, Peter focuses on the image of water by which the righteous in Noah's day were saved. By passing through the waters of Baptism, we share in the Lord's victory over death and enter into the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

All of this we remember so beautifully at the Easter Vigil. Come if you can to this very unique Mass of Easter – Saturday night March 31, 8 PM, this year only at Holy Family. We should have several baptisms that evening.

In the Gospel today, we hear the very first words of Jesus:

“This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel.”

These 19 words of Jesus are about time, a new reality, and action.

The time is God's special time (the word in Greek is Kairos) – not linear hours, minutes, or seconds, but sacred time – as reflected in the will of God.

In God's sacred time there exists a new reality called the Kingdom of God. This is God's divine presence manifested in the words and actions of Jesus.

And finally, this new reality demands a radical response on our part - characterized by change – repentance – conversion of heart and believing in the good news.

Our pastorate theme this Lent is: Are we there yet? Journeying with Jesus. We are using as a reminder various familiar highway signs. On last week's first pastorate wide bulletin - Slow Construction Zone; this week Sharp Curve Ahead.

These signs remind us to slow down a bit during these 40 Days.

Take off the cruise control. Take better care of your spiritual engine. Drive carefully and maybe use that road between your house and St Mary or Holy Family a little more often during Lent:

--Come to the Stations of the Cross on Fridays - 12:00 Noon at St Mary, 7:00 PM at Holy Family. On Good Friday you have the Walking Stations at 6PM again here at St Mary.

--If you can try and make daily mass, maybe once during the week.

--and get to Confession during Lent. There is no better time and more opportunities for the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Look for that information in the bulletin and on the web page.

--While you're on your road trip we even have some rest stops along the way with a couple of soup nights and fish fries on some of the Fridays of Lent.

--and for alms giving, we have made it easy. You can fill up a can with "Change for Haiti" as your generosity makes possible the daily hot meal for almost 350 children each school day.

Temptations are real. And facing them can mean you're actually on the right path.

A noted spiritual author wrote, "At our first steps toward authenticity—or love or compassion or any high calling—every devil in hell will come out to meet us."

Even setbacks shouldn't cause us to throw in the towel, but can lead to a deeper reliance on God, and grace, when future temptations come our way.

Let these 40 days:

--be a time for seeing our lives as a gift from God;

--approaching life's challenges with a sense of gratitude for what we have, and are, rather than anger and despair for what our lives are not;

May Lent be a season for rediscovering the hope and joy that leads us away from "entertaining" the temptations of "Satan's world", and toward Easter resurrection.