

1 Lent year B readings and Commentary

Celebration summary by Dale J. Sieverding: Do you want more spice in your life? Faster, stronger, leaner...bigger, louder and more powerful. The world is full of temptation and the marketing establishment has perfected its craft to let us have it all. No money...no problem, new furniture with NO PAYMENTS for 1 year. The message of Sunday I of Lent is that you and I cannot put the spiritual life on hold (on credit) forever. And more, even the Christ knows temptation. The good news — God's reign is here and now. Open your eyes, hear the call to conversion, pay your bills, sacrifice and know God's grace in a new way this Easter as you renew the promises made at your baptism.

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First Reading Genesis 9:8-15

A reading from the Book of Genesis

God said to Noah and to his sons with him:

"See, I am now establishing my covenant with you
and your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you:
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals
that were with you and came out of the ark.

I will establish my covenant with you,
that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed
by the waters of a flood;
there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth."

God added:

"This is the sign that I am giving for all ages to come,
of the covenant between me and you
and every living creature with you:
I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign
of the covenant between me and the earth.

When I bring clouds over the earth,
and the bow appears in the clouds,
I will recall the covenant I have made
between me and you and all living beings,
so that the waters shall never again become a flood
to destroy all mortal beings."

The word of the Lord

Commentary Genesis 9:8-15 by Tom Conry: Covenant theology begins by imitating the language of Ancient Near Eastern treaties between rulers and their vassals. Both the Ten Commandments and the Code of Hammurabi are

examples of this kind of pattern. It is fundamentally a charter of rights, granted from a great king to those who are his subjects. In the Davidic covenant (see 2 Sam 7:1-17), for example, God establishes an agreement establishing David's throne (that is, his royal heirs) forever.

Although the story of the covenant of Noah is set earlier in the biblical narrative, it was actually written considerably later in history. By this time the covenant is extended not only to all of Noah's descendants (that is, all of humanity Gen 9:9) but also to "every living being" (Gen 9:11). The new treaty is between God and all of life, no exceptions; there is a fourfold repetition of this motif to hammer home the point.

The identification of the sign of the bow (keshet) as a rainbow comes from its identification with Ezek 1:28. There are many more uses of this word in the Hebrew scriptures as the bow of an archer, and it is impossible to say whether the sign in the clouds was understood as a rainbow or a constellation. Gilgamesh (XI, column IV) also mentions a rainbow given to humankind as a gift of the goddess Eanna but with the opposite significance: "to ever remind us of dimmer, sadder days."

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Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9;

✠(cf. 10) Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Your ways, O LORD, make known to me;
teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my savior.

Remember that your compassion, O LORD,
and your love are from of old.
In your kindness remember me,
because of your goodness, O LORD.

Good and upright is the LORD,
thus he shows sinners the way.
He guides the humble to justice,
and he teaches the humble his way.

Commentary Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9 by Maribeth Howell, OP: It is interesting that the psalm selected to follow today's reading from Genesis is most often identified as an individual lament. Then again, the verses that have been

selected for the lectionary do not include those that we most often associate with a psalm of lament or complaint. What we find here are verses that are reminiscent of a psalm of trust/confidence, or even a wisdom psalm. The exception to this might be a portion of verse 1, that verse NOT used in the lectionary, but which both Marty Haugen and Michael Joncas have used in their well known versions of the psalm, *To you, O Lord*.

Regardless of the portion of the psalm that is selected for use on this first Sunday of Lent, the text is a lovely prayer that speaks of one's desire to know and follow the ways of God. It is a prayer that acknowledges that God is good and loving. It is a prayer that asks God both for mercy and for help. The psalmist knows that God is good and reliable. Clearly, the psalmist is dependent upon God for sustenance.

Verse 10, which appears as the refrain in the *New American Bible*, would seem to place emphasis on the "ways of God," ways that the psalmist trusts are reliable. Thus, whether the psalm be sung (according to the melody of either Haugen or Joncas), or if it is recited in the manner in which it has been presented in the lectionary, Psalm 25 invites us to reflect upon the mysterious and trustworthy ways of our God.

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Second Reading 1 Peter 3:18-22

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

Christ suffered for sins once,
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God.

Put to death in the flesh,

he was brought to life in the Spirit.

In it he also went to preach to the spirits in prison,

who had once been disobedient

while God patiently waited in the days of Noah

during the building of the ark,

in which a few persons, eight in all,

were saved through water.

This prefigured baptism, which saves you now.

It is not a removal of dirt from the body

but an appeal to God for a clear conscience,

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

who has gone into heaven

and is at the right hand of God,

with angels, authorities, and powers subject to him.

The word of the Lord.

Commentary 1 Peter 3:18-22 by Tom Conry: The first epistle of Peter (probably written after Peter's death in his name rather than by Peter himself) is an exhortation to maintain solidarity in the midst of a hostile environment. The community is described as visiting strangers and resident aliens, marginalized outsiders who needed to stay together in order to survive their social situation. In this respect the letter mirrors the themes of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Thus the metaphor of Noah's ark was especially appealing for the author; the community of faith was the new lifeboat destined to save humanity and vindicate those few who had remained steadfast in the face of adversity. Eight, the number of people saved on the ark, was a symbol of perfection. It was one more than the number of days of creation, signifying completeness and unity.

The reference to Christ preaching to the spirits in prison who had once been disobedient seems to be a reference to the patrons of wicked rulers; this is the way the expression is used in 1 Enoch ("a testimony for the kings and the mighty who possess the earth") and it is consistent with the proclamation that now all angels and authorities and powers are subject to the risen Christ. For the author of 1 Peter, all people of faith are to follow Christ's example and preach truth to power, even in circumstances of imprisonment and death.

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Gospel Acclamation Matthew 4:4b

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

Gospel Mark 1:12-15

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,
and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.
He was among wild beasts,
and the angels ministered to him.

After John had been arrested,
Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God:
"This is the time of fulfillment.
The kingdom of God is at hand.
Repent, and believe in the gospel."

The Gospel of the Lord.

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Commentary Mark 1:12-15 by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: NOW is the time to REPENT and believe in the good news of Jesus Christ.

God's protection of Jesus during his testing by Satan for forty days--in reminiscence of the testing of the ancient people of Israel for forty years in the desert--assures us that Jesus is uniquely qualified to assist us in our own struggles with the powers of evil that threaten to control all human lives. We are persuaded to orient our lives toward and place our faith in this Jesus who, equipped with God's Spirit (1:10) and guarded by God's angels against the menace of evil ("wild beasts"), can effectively lead us on the "way" (1:2-3) of God's salvation in our often misdirected and disoriented lives.

John the Baptist's arrest subtly yet ominously alerts us to the danger and risk that can result from opposition to preaching the "way of the Lord." But the urgent command of Jesus to "repent and believe in the gospel!" reinforces and intensifies John's prior call for conversion (1:4). Captivated by the thrilling and joyous "good news" of God exclaimed by Jesus, we are further induced to convert our lives during this season of Lent, to turn away from our past and open ourselves anew to God's salvific and sovereign "kingdom" that has now arrived in the person and preaching of Jesus, and to entrust ourselves totally in faith to this gospel of God as powerfully proclaimed by Jesus.

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