

## **1<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT YEAR B 2021**

Welcome to the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent. I want to begin by emphasizing that Lent is meant to be enjoyed and not to be just endured. It invites us to mature in our faith and to emerge spiritually stronger through self-discipline. During this time, we prepare spiritually for the celebration of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The Church tries to achieve this goal by leading her children to "*repentance*" asking them to re-organize their priorities and change their values, ideals and ambitions, through self-control, prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

In the first reading, having saved Noah and all who had been in the ark, God made a covenant with him and all his descendants. No matter how much the power of sin and its effects flood every area of our lives, salvation is possible for those enter the ark and separate themselves from evil. Noah's rescue from the flood symbolizes how we are saved through the waters of baptism which cleanse us of sin and make us one with Christ.

St. Peter has reminded us that an outward sign of the New Covenant that God made with His people through Jesus is baptism which makes us adopted children of God. By His death and resurrection, Christ opened the spring of baptism through which we are purified and restored to God. Through the season of Lent, we are called to renew our commitment to the new covenant. Lent is a time of retreat for us all in preparation for the renewal of our baptismal vows at Easter.

In the gospel, we are told how Jesus, immediately after His baptism, faced and defeated the tempter. He prepared for this by His forty days of prayer and fasting in the desert. Lent is a training period. It trains us to combat evil through our desert experience as Jesus did.

Lent offers us a period of self-discipline and we all know that discipline is sometimes painful but yields the desired results. There would be some initial pain in reforming ourselves but in the end, trained by Lent, we would emerge spiritually strong as Jesus emerged from the desert.

There is a kind of urgency in Jesus' message. The time is fulfilled, the time is now! Repent and believe the good news; the good news of your salvation as promised in the Old Testament covenants like the one made with Noah. So, what are we waiting for? Lent began last Ash Wednesday! Have we decided on what we are doing this Lent or are we just riding along? Using prayer, fasting and almsgiving, may we work toward conversion and holiness.

In addition to fasting and abstaining, we should use Lent as a time for personal reflection on how we are accepting the gospel challenges in thought, word and deed. It is also a time to assess our relationships with our families, friends, school mates, work colleagues and the other people we encounter, especially those of our parish.

May we use Lent for our spiritual growth and maturity. May you set yourself some goals for this Lenten season. For example; participating in the weekday Masses whenever possible, setting aside some part of your day for personal prayer and Scripture reading. We are also called upon to support those in need and to receive the sacrament of reconciliation in Lent.

Just like our master was tempted, we too shall be tempted. The devil stands steadfast against everything Jesus proposes. May we then brace ourselves for the coming temptations fighting them with prayer, fasting and charity. Amen.