

Sunday, February 22, 2015

First Sunday of Lent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Genesis 9:8-15

2nd Reading: 1 Peter 3:18-22

Responsorial: Psalm 25:4-9

Gospel: Mark 1:12-15

Lent, A Time to Experience New Life in Christ

I will establish my covenant with you. (Genesis 9:11)

The story of Noah and the Great Flood assures us that destruction is never God's final word. Whatever "death" we experience—whatever "death" he brings into our lives—is always followed by the promise of new life. Or as many motivational speakers would tell us, there's always a rainbow after every storm.

This is a good thing to keep in mind as we celebrate the first Sunday in Lent. It's helpful to recall that the culmination of these forty days is not Good Friday; it's Easter. Yes, God asks us to die to ourselves and resist temptation. But he is asking this so that we can clear out more space in our hearts for him and for his grace. The discipline and self-sacrifice we take up during Lent are not ends in themselves. They are not here so that we can prove our strength or increase our skills. Rather, we take them on so that we can become more fully alive in Christ, more able to reveal his love to the people around us.

Are you still trying to decide what to give up for Lent? Try answering that question by looking at this season as a journey of love. What is hindering you from loving more fully? Perhaps gossip, overwork, dwelling on resentments, or self-isolation? Find a way to give them up, or at least reduce their influence. Try to find life-giving substitutes for them. Take a walk with a friend. Stop in and visit the Blessed Sacrament between errands. Make it a point to find something uplifting to say in every conversation. Whatever you choose, ask the Holy Spirit to work creatively with you.

This Lent, keep your eyes on the prize: new life in Christ. It's a life that begins right now, every time you receive or give love. It's a life that springs up from every kind of death-to-self you embrace. It's a life that will lead you to the final prize: eternal life with Jesus.

"Here I am, Lord. I'm ready to journey with you toward Easter."

(Many thanks to *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission. *The Word Among Us* Mass Edition contains all the Mass readings and prayers, and a meditation for each of the daily and Sunday Masses.)

Sunday, February 22, 2015

Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

1. In the first reading, the story of God's covenant promises to Noah reminds us that during Lent we celebrate the new Covenant that God has made with each of us through the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. What are some parallels between God's covenant with Noah and his New Covenant with us? What are some differences?
2. In the responsorial psalm, the psalmist reminds us of God's compassion, love, kindness, and goodness toward each of us. Why are these characteristics of God so important to keep in mind during this grace-filled season of Lent?
3. The second reading reminds us that Lent is a period of confidence and trust in God because of what Jesus did for us through his passion, death, and resurrection. We should be encouraged by the thought that our Lord Jesus Christ "has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God." Everything we have comes from him, including our talents, and even our strength to persevere no matter what the circumstances. How often do you turn to the Lord during the day when faced with difficulties? What steps can you take to turn to the Lord more often each day during Lent?
4. The Gospel scene is the temptation in the desert, which opens the public life of Jesus. This reading in Mark declares, in just a few words, the great change in our lives that Christ introduced into the world. Unlike Adam, who fell, Christ triumphs over the power of Satan and then begins to proclaim the "gospel of God" with these words: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." This Gospel message heralds the possibility of our victory over Satan and temptation. Do you believe that in Christ, you too have the power to resist and/or overcome temptation? Why or why not? What concrete steps can you take during the day to help you in resisting and/or overcoming temptation?
5. We know that the graces we experience in the Sacrament of Reconciliation include not only the forgiveness of our sins, but also the power to overcome temptations. In what ways, through this sacrament, have you experienced not only forgiveness, but also the strengthening of your relationship with Jesus and the grace and power to overcome temptations and sin patterns in your life?
6. The meditation takes an unusual approach in suggesting some things we can "give up for Lent," and what we can substitute in their place. Which of the ones suggested do you feel led to commit to during Lent?
7. The meditation also reminds us that Lent is a time to "keep your eyes on the prize: new life in Christ." What does it mean for you to experience "new life in Christ" during Lent?
8. Take some time now to pray that you would experience all the graces Jesus wants to pour out on your journey toward Easter and new life in Christ. Use the prayer at the end of the meditation as the starting point.

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, a director of partner relations for **The Word Among Us Partners**, (<http://www.waupartners.org/>); a ministry of **The Word Among Us** (www.wau.org) to the military, prisoners, women with crisis pregnancies or who have had abortions, and college students. He is also a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. Maurice was also the founding Executive Director of the **National Fellowship of Catholic Men**, for which he is currently a Trustee (<http://www.nfcmusa.org/>). He can be contacted at mblumberg@wau.org or mblumberg@aol.com.]