

2021 B 1st Sunday of Lent Feb. 21

We have heard the question at the beginning of Lent: **What did you give up for Lent?** You would think the litany of different things: Fewer sweets, less TV, less gossip, no meat and so on. We have it seems, somehow missed God's invitation announced to Noah in the 1st reading.

Anyone of us who takes our baptism seriously and is present at this Eucharist recognize that **Lent intensifies a relationship with God and the people.** Fast and abstinence, the ascetical practices are there to help us to build that relationship.

Lack of zeal for our covenant relationship with God weakens that relationship and it begins to go downhill. It's probably no wonder Jesus calls us on Ash Wednesday not to go around with sullen faces and marks us to begin **a new start to get back or reenforce our friendship with God** with penance, prayer and charitable activities.

After the great flood God makes a covenant with Noah making a promise, *"Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood and never again will there be another one."* And sets a rainbow in the clouds over the earth as a sign and says, *"I will remember my covenant between me and you."*

Promises made and promises kept. Remember God's promise whenever you see a rainbow in the clouds.

We are all inspired when someone keeps a promise against uncompromised odds.

Remember the late comedian Phil Silvers said once his small daughter woke him up when he was taking a much-needed nap. He scolded her, "Didn't you promise to be a good girl." And he said harshly, "And didn't I tell you that you would get a spanking if you weren't a good girl?" "Yes, daddy," said his daughter softly. Then she added, "But since I've broken my promise, you don't have to keep yours?"

Well, **sometimes a promise of deserved punishment can be modified by mercy.** The power of promise. Some of you know about the power of a promise kept. You saw it in your parents' marriage, though some of us are not that fortunate. You have seen it in your spouse, though again, some you are not so fortunate. You have seen it in your faithful friends. Some of you have experienced it in those dark hours when you most needed God's power and you discovered God was there.

God is a promise keeper. He keeps his promises. And he doesn't need a rainbow to remind him of His promise: "I will never forget you nor forsake you. I am Abba, Daddy, and I love you more than any earthly parent ever could."

That is what the cross is all about. The rainbow may be a reminder to God, but **the cross is the reminder to us that God so loved the world that he gave his Son for us.**

The 2nd reading from 1st Peter understands the flood and the covenant made with Noah as baptism, where we are given a lifelong seal and mission to cooperate with God's will through the gift of God's grace.

Jesus mirrors the Father's fidelity to us in sealing the covenant as both God and man. This early episode in the life of Christ in Mark's gospel helps us to understand the mystery of Incarnation to discover the wonder of the divine promise that will unfold for us in these weeks before the Triduum.

Mystery of Incarnation: The stunning mystery is simply this: God for a time, became one of us. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

God became flesh in the form of Jesus Christ. He was miraculously conceived, yet naturally delivered. He was born of a virgin. Lived like anyone of us. Tempted like anyone of us but did not sin.

Had Jesus simply descended to earth in the form of a mighty being, we would respect him but never would draw near to him. After all, how could God understand what it means to be human?

Had Jesus been biologically conceived with two earthly parents, we would draw near to him, but would we want to worship him? After all, he would be no different than you and me.

But if Jesus was both—God and man at the same time—then we have the best of both worlds. Neither his humanity nor deity compromised. He was fully human. He was fully divine. Because of the first, we draw near. Because of the divine, we worship.

Such is the message of Colossians 1:15-16: "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the first-born-over-all-creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, ... all things have been created through him and for him."

What are the promises you have made in your life? Have you kept them?" If you haven't, God's grace is sufficient for you. That is His promise and that promise never fails. But hope you are working on being a promise-keeper, just as God is a promise-keeper. I guarantee you that if you will, the world will be better for it.