

First Sunday of Lent, Year B, Catechist

Submitted by lectionaryadmin on Wed, 01/14/2015 - 19:00

Catechist Background and Preparation

To prepare for this session, read all the readings.

Genesis 9:8-15

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

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:12-15

Spend a few minutes reflecting on what these readings mean for you today. Is there a particular reading that appeals to you? Is there a word or image that engages you?

Read the following **Word in Liturgy** and **Catholic Doctrine** sections. Read the Word in Liturgy and Catholic Doctrine sections. These give you background on what you will be doing this session. Read over the session outline and make it your own. Check to see what materials you will need.

The Word In Liturgy

Although every Lent is a forty-day retreat in preparation for Easter, each year of the lectionary cycle highlights a different aspect of this preparation. Year B, our present year, develops the theme of covenant and renewal of covenant, through a deft use of the Old Testament scriptures. Each Sunday calls to mind one of the great covenants of the old dispensation, from Noah (Lent 1) to Jeremiah's announcement of the new covenant (Lent 5). Thus, the liturgy of Lent in Year B offers a meditation on the commitment of God in relationship with the human race and the created world.

Contrary to modern sensibilities, the story of Noah sees in human sinfulness the corruption of the whole of creation, of which people are a part. God's judgment therefore comes upon everyone and everything. Like the forty days of Lent, forty days of deluge are required to purify the earth. This is strong medicine. The flood is a terrifying and cataclysmic disaster, signifying not only divine punishment through water, but also an unleashing of the restraints placed upon the waters in creation, and a return to primordial chaos.

Mark's account of the temptation of Jesus is brief, and the wilderness setting that dominates the beginning of the gospel sets the stage for it. Several features distinguish Mark's account from the other synoptics. Foremost among these is the absence of both a triumph over Satan and an end to temptation. This is because in Mark's gospel the temptation of Jesus and his struggle against Satan continue throughout his public ministry.

Catholic Doctrine

Baptismal Covenant

The Old Testament idea of covenant (Hebrew berit) is complex. God has made and kept various covenants throughout sacred history. God renewed the original blessing and promise of creation in a covenant with Noah after the flood. The calling and testing of Abraham's faith later issues forth in a covenant that promises that Abraham's descendants will be in a special relationship with Yahweh and will be as numerous as the stars. This covenant between Abraham and God is further solidified on Mount Sinai when Moses receives the Law from the Most High. A centuries-long development,

what are the main characteristics of covenant?

First, the covenant between God and God's people is the result of divine initiative. The relationship expressed in the covenant is not bilateral, as between equals. God is superior to us, our creator. Yet God is not aloof or indifferent, but reaches out in love.

Second, the covenant God chooses to establish is not subject to human qualifications. God alone sets the terms. Expressed as a unilateral oath both to Noah and to Abraham, divine love cannot be compromised by human infidelity or limitations. The perfect love of God invites people into a relationship, again and again saving them, no matter how many times they turn away or forget.

Third, the proper response to this perfect love is obedience. To heed God's call is to listen to and understand the promise being extended and to surrender in faith. Those who hear and obey, following God's command, will benefit, as did the people of Israel who kept God's law.

For Christians, these three characteristics also describe our baptismal covenant with God in Christ. Through baptism we enter into a committed relationship with God in Christ—a relationship we owe to God's initiative of grace. God's commitment to us is not deterred by our weakness or infidelity, but remains faithful. Baptism imparts a permanent spiritual mark, or character, which can never be taken away. Last of all, through baptism we become part of the people of God and are called to live a life "worthy of the gospel," rejecting sin and living by our faith. Baptism is a gateway providing access to all the other sacraments by giving us a new birth, joining us to Christ and his Church and propelling us into mission.

Catholics also believe that through baptism a person not longer lives only for himself or herself. Baptism challenges us to live for others, to join in the mission of Christ. The Second Vatican Council emphasized the calling of every baptized member "to profess before [the world] the faith received from God through the Church."

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