

Less than three months ago we started the new season of Advent, during which we prepared for the coming of our Savior, Jesus. Fast forward (real fast) to this past Wednesday, called Ash Wednesday, the start of the other season of preparation in our liturgical year, the season of Lent. Like Advent, which ends on the joyous day of Christmas, at the end of Lent is the very joyous day of Easter, when we celebrate the raising of Jesus from the dead. However, in reality Lent ends with the Passion of Jesus, that is, His Last Supper, His agony in the garden before His arrest, and His suffering and death on the cross. So Lent is a serious time. You don't say, "Happy Lent," because Lent is not a holiday season. We are getting ready for Good Friday when Jesus dies on the cross. We are not happy that Jesus had to die. We are thrilled that He rises from the dead on Easter. *That's* the time for the feast. But it's not time to be happy yet in Lent. And this solemn time is the reason that the Church even stops saying "Alleluia" during the season of Lent until Easter.

You may have gone to church this past Ash Wednesday to receive ashes (in a different way, courtesy of the Corona virus and the Vatican). Those ashes serve as a reminder that our human bodies are from this earth, and they will return to the earth when they die (as God told Adam and Eve after they sinned), but our souls can go on to heaven. While Lent is the season during which we prepare for Easter, the word *Lent* comes from old English, Dutch, & German words which actually mean lengthening day, which is what happens in the springtime. And as the days gradually get longer, the days gradually get warmer, which is why, after a long, cold winter, people generally like springtime so much. This changeover from winter to spring takes place during Lent. So Lent in a way is the springtime of the Church. It is 40 days long. In the Bible, 40 is a number associated with penance and renewing relationships with God.

Turning to today's readings, let's remember the story of Noah. A long time ago in the early part of the Old Testament, God was unhappy about all the sinfulness in the world. In all the world, the only good people He could find were Noah and his family. So God decided to rid the world of evil by destroying all His creatures, except Noah, his family, and two members of all the different animals God instructed Noah to put on a huge ark, or boat, that He told Noah to build. When Noah had finished building the ark and loaded all the animals and his family on it, God made it rain for 40 days and 40 nights (there's that number 40) until every living creature on the earth was destroyed. Today's reading takes place after enough of the water had drained away that Noah and his family could get off of the ark.

A reading from the Book of Genesis (Gen 9:8-15).

God told Noah and his sons: "I am going to make a solemn promise to you and to all who will live after you. This includes the birds and animals that come out of the boat. I promise every living creature on earth that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood. ¶ "The rainbow that I have put into the sky will be my sign to you and to every living creature on earth. It will tell you that I will keep this solemn promise forever. When I send clouds to cover the earth, and the rainbow appears in the sky, I will remember my promise to you and to all other living creatures. Never again will I let flood waters destroy *all* life." ¶ The word of the Lord.

Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 25:4-5abc, 6 & 7cd).

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Show me Your paths and teach me to follow; guide me by Your truth and instruct me. You keep me safe.

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Please, Lord, remember, You have always been patient and kind. Show how truly kind You are and remember me.

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

A covenant is a promise. The psalm is about the Lord's kindness "to those who keep [His] covenant," asking God to guide us and instruct us to follow Him like Noah did. Lent is a time when we are supposed to get reconnected with God. How? By following Jesus. Usually, the best way to follow Jesus is to follow His examples. For instance, you may remember just five weeks ago we celebrated the feast of Jesus' baptism. After He was baptized, the sky opened up and the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus in the form of a dove, and God the Father spoke out of the sky about how pleased He was with His son. Jesus then went right to the desert to spend 40 days (there's that number 40 again) to be with His Father, to pray to Him and listen to Him. Today's gospel begins with that trip into the desert.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to St. Mark (Mark 1:12-15).

Right away God's Spirit made Jesus go into the desert. He stayed there for forty days while Satan tested Him. Jesus was with the wild animals, but angels took care of Him. ¶ After John

was arrested, Jesus went to Galilee and told the good news that comes from God. He said, “The time has come! God’s kingdom will soon be here. Turn back to God, and believe the good news!” ¶ The Gospel of the Lord.

What are we supposed to do for *these* 40 days of Lent? How do we prepare for Jesus’ death on the cross on Good Friday and His resurrection on Easter Sunday? How can we reconnect with God? Well, we have Jesus’ examples for some ideas:

Pray more often—*give more time to God*, like Jesus did in the desert

Give up something—*clear more space in your life for God*—get rid of distractions. For example, you could:

Give up eating something and *be closer to God*, like Jesus did in the desert.

Give up an activity, like video games or internet surfing/Facebook/Instagram/TikTok, etc. to *make more time for God/*

Give up sin. Resist the temptation of sin, *like Jesus did in the desert*, “He stayed there...while Satan tested Him.” Who knows? It could become a habit after Lent.

And here’s a biggie, do something special to help others—*give up some time, volunteering to help others.*

So during Lent give more time to God. Clear more space in your life for God. Resist sin. Follow Jesus’ many examples. Reconnect with God!

And that, boys and girls, is the lesson in today’s readings.

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First Sunday of Lent, 2021