

This Gospel passage is one of the shortest we will hear all year

But not the homily

In this short passage, though

We find everything we need for a successful Lent

But to have a successful Lent

We need to know why we are doing what we do

Why do we fast?

Why do we ramp up our prayers?

Why do we look for ways to give?

These things in and of themselves are of no value

We do these things to empty ourselves so we may be filled

If we are filled with ourselves

God's grace will be like water on a ducks back

It will ball up and roll off

But if we are emptied of the things in this world

God's grace will be like a gentle rain on a well tilled field

It will soak deep

And give nourishment to our souls like rain for a garden

First we need the context of the Old Testament

This is our story

The story of sin affecting the world

Then and today

God hates sin

Because it takes his prized possession away from him

Sin gets between God and us

It takes our attention from Him

God hates sin so much, at one point he destroyed most of His creation

Just to rid the world of sin

But even here

A little bit remained in the hearts of Noah and his descendants

And over time, it grew

And it continues to grow today

The covenant with Noah was not a perfect covenant

Because we are not perfect

So God made other covenants

With Abraham and David

And finally, a new covenant

In Jesus Christ God makes his final covenant

Sin still gets in our way

The sin of the world

And our personal sin

But in Jesus Christ, God gives us a way out

Through the sacraments, we are made new creatures

Again and again

As often as we need

We do not adhere to once saved, always saved

That all I have to do is accept Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior

This is not a one-time deal

And although as Catholics we do not use these particular words normally

This is what we do every time we receive a sacrament

At the Eucharist today

Receiving Jesus Christ with a pure heart

You will be entering again into the covenant you have with God

Every time a husband and wife come together in the marital embrace

They are renewing their covenant with God

Every time you receive the sacrament of reconciliation

You are renewing your covenant with God

Accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior

That is what it is to renew your covenant with God

A covenant He initiates

It was God's will to create each one of us

That we should be baptized into his family

To become his sons and daughters

And when we turn our backs

It is His initiative to call us back to His embrace

And he walks with us in our pilgrimage through this life

He shows us how to undo the damage Satan and sin inflict

Although, as I said, this Gospel account is very sort

We can always turn to the other familiar Gospels to get the details

This will help us to identify with Jesus Christ

To see he is walking the walk, and inviting us to do the same

This event in Jesus' life comes about right after his baptism

We see neither his baptism nor ours is all that is needed

Right after his baptism, he is led by the Spirit into the wilderness

Into a place of temptation

God allows these things in our lives

And He gives us free will to choose

Jesus faced temptations

And we are called to answer the same questions he was asked

What does God want of me?

Who does God want me to be?

How does He want me to live my life?

Satan first tempts Jesus to make himself the center of his life

To measure the good by sensual pleasure

As important as a full belly is

Is it the most important?

We all know Jesus' answer

One does not live by bread alone

But by every word that comes from the mouth of God

Next Satan tempts Jesus' ego

Throw yourself from the temple

Put on a show for the others

And Christ's answer?

You shall not put the Lord your God to the test

Then off to the mountain top

All the kingdoms of the world on display

All yours

You need only do one thing

Prostrate yourself before me, worship me

The temptation to make power your god

To say you are the authority of good and evil

If you have the power, everyone will serve you

Jesus responds '*Get away from me Satan*

The Lord your God shall you worship

Him alone shall you serve'

When we are tempted

We respond with the Word of Christ

For at the Word of Jesus, even Satan must depart

This is why the Church gives us these 40 days of Lent

Our lives are so busy

With so much technology at our fingertips

We can become enslaved to the technology

With so many time saving things

Our lives are filled with gadgets

We check email when we open our eyes until we drift off to sleep

Activities and schedules for the kids is a full time job

We often even need a vacation when we return from vacation

Lent is a time to take a step back

To reinvigorate our spiritual lives

To see where the chinks are in our covenant

To allow God's grace to heal what sin has damaged

As the waters of the flood washed the world clean

Let the waters of our baptism wash our souls clean

Let the graces of confirmation, reconciliation

The Eucharist, marriage, Holy Orders and anointing

Let these be our guide through the wilderness

**So what we offer up for Lent is not something that takes away
from who we are**

But frees us to become who we are meant to be

Sons and daughters of a loving Father

Living his covenantal life with each other

Building His kingdom here and now

Brick by brick

Grace by grace