

As we come together for this first Sunday of Lent

We see a theme in our readings

A theme that will permeate the 5 weeks of Lent

Leading us to Holy Week

The Old Testament explores God's covenantal relationship

And how far He is willing to go to restore that relationship

We will see signs like the rainbow

A test of Faith with Abraham

Moses receiving the 10 Commandments

A pagan king cooperating with God's plan

And the New Covenant promised to Isaiah

As Francis Thompson wrote in his famous poem *The Hound of Heaven*

God does not give up on us

His chosen people turn away again and again and again

But He remains faithful

And renews His covenants

Always there waiting for us to return

Our Epistles also have their theme

It is the identity of Christ

And our identity in him

Showing us just how far God is willing to go

To show us His love and Mercy

Even offering His Only Son on the cross

And the Gospels are a journey through salvation history

The story of God's hand in our lives

Leading to our salvation

Today's first reading is God's covenant with Noah

The flood has ended

A great purification has taken place

Noah finds himself on solid ground

We see God's desire to establish a covenant with Noah

A covenant with all his descendants

A covenant with all of creation

A multi-generational covenant

One that remains in force even today

As a reminder

He promises to place His bow in the sky

For the ancients this had a deep meaning

Like a warrior returning in victory from doing battle

He would hang up his bow as a sign the battle had been won

He could now rest in safety

The flood recalled the beginning of creation

When water and chaos covered the entire earth

God defeats chaos and establishes order

With the great flood

Chaos gains the upper hand momentarily

But God again establishes order and defeats chaos

Now, He promises that this time is the last time

We can rest in security

And God hangs His bow in the sky as a promise and as a reminder

This covenant is now partially fulfilled in Jesus Christ

It will be fulfilled in its fullness at the second coming

We live between these 2 events

It was the Spirit that was sent to bring order from chaos in Genesis

The Spirit that guided the judges of Israel

The Spirit led the kings of Israel

Bringing about a nation

The Spirit brought them through the wilderness after they fled Egypt

In our Gospel today

This same Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness

Preparing him for 40 days

These 40 days are significant

The flood came about after 40 days and 40 nights of rain

Moses fasted for 40 days and nights before he was given the 10

Commandments

The Israelites were led in the dessert for 40 years

The wilderness is where the Israelites failed to measure up

Again and again they failed to pass the test

This is the wilderness Christ defeats

We continue this today with the 40 days of lent

Days spent preparing for something special

Emptying our hearts so we can receive the grace God desires for us

Jesus spends these 40 days preparing himself for his mission

And for the ultimate sacrifice he would offer on the cross

A mission he announces today

This is the time of fulfillment

The kingdom of God is at hand

Repent and believe in the Gospel

The time announced is not a chronological time

Not a specific year

It is an eschatological moment

The time of fulfillment is today

The kingdom of God is at hand

The Israelite people had been expecting this moment

But again it is a moment that is not contained in time

It is at hand today

For each of us to realize

To grasp

To live

To build the kingdom in our world

How do we go about building the kingdom?

Realizing it is God who does the building

But he desires our cooperation

So we have these 40 days of lent

Yes, to offer prayer, sacrifice and almsgiving

But that is secondary

We do this to empty ourselves of our pride and egoism

So we can receive from God

Whatever it is He desires to give us

Doing this, God will accomplish great things for us and in us

Defeating not physical floods

But the floods that continue to threaten us

Floodwaters of greed, lust, drugs and alcoholism

Floodwaters of materialism, communism and socialism

All with their own god

Seeking to replace the Triune God

There is evil in our world

An evil that becomes real in all these mass-shootings

Satin is very busy in these attacks

Through people cooperating with him

But they have been defeated

As we read in our letter from St James

**The flood of Noah was a prefigurement of the flood of grace in
baptism**

This flood of grace does not destroy

But brings life

Opening us to a relationship with our merciful Father

**A relationship that is strengthened by the body and blood of His
Only Son**

So we may enter into our mission

So God may build His kingdom

Our invitation these 40 days is simple to grasp

But a challenge to live

Repent, and believe in the Gospel