

The Lord be with you:

and also with you.

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

as we gather we must recall the promises and warnings given to us in the Scriptures.

Let us therefore examine ourselves and repent of our sins.

Father, we confess that we often take the gifts of your creation for granted, and use them chiefly to further our own interests:

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Christ, we confess that we often give in to the selfish desires of our hearts, and the uncaring ways of the world.

Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Holy Spirit, we confess that we often close our minds to your influence, and fail to bear good fruits in our lives.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution May God our Father forgive us our sins,
and bring us to the fellowship of his table with his saints for ever. **Amen.**

Genesis 9:8-17

God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.' This is the word of the Lord;

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 25:1-10 Listen to a few verses of today's psalm as John Shera plays.

Mark 1:9-15 [The Baptism of Jesus]

In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

[The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry]

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

This is the gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Sermon

This is a private prayer I often use; its from Psalm 19: May the words of my lips and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

The Bible is a huge collection of books, of stories and examples, of prophets and prophecies, of poetry, fables, history; of actions and interventions by God with humanity. God's revelation. To the Israelites; to Roman Catholic Christians of the West; to Orthodox Christians of the East; to Anglicans; to all Christians. From the 78 books of the Bible we have some great examples of the richness and diversity of the Bible in our readings today. I want to entice you into the worlds, the milieus of some of these passages, each from a different stage of the development of our relationship with God.

Genesis was composed and compiled over 400 years from the tenth to sixth century BCE, probably completed during the Exile. It's a book of memories – of marvels & miracles, but also of foundational stories and of teaching myths, from earliest Judaism. Here we have an early pre-Israelite story of the result of the flood and Noah's ark. God promises – he covenants – that no natural disaster will again threaten the entire human race. A covenant in this instance was a bargain – a contract between God and his people. We are treated to the beautiful imagery of the rainbow – it's an earthy, easily remembered symbol from nature. And the message that has held good from that image is that God is with us – by our side.

Mark gives us today another example of God's willingness to be involved with us, and to stay involved with us. Mark was probably written by a follower of Peter; some trace this to when they were in Rome. What does matter, though, is Mark's reason for writing it. It is short, but very much to the point: Mark has a clear theological reason for writing his gospel, and his message is simple and trenchant – to convince us why Jesus is SO special - that Jesus is the Messiah. Today we start right at the beginning of the Gospel, at the baptism of Jesus. And (I hope you have realised this!) there is no birth narrative. No: he cuts to the chase, to the heart of the matter.

And Mark does this in four major stages in his Gospel – by constructing four tableaux which are told as simple but powerful, effective dramas. So he starts with the Baptism of Jesus, followed by the transformative Transfiguration on the mountain (which we pondered last Sunday); then to the Last Supper, and finishing with the Resurrection of Jesus. And like a good dramatist, at each stage he puts another building block in place before moving to the next tableau, so that finally he hopes that Jesus must be seen as – can only be - the Messiah, the promised one of God. All of these tableaux are described in short, spare passages, with not a word wasted; each has a clear message, a clear point.

Take Mark's treatment of the Baptism of Jesus. Mark uses a quote from Isaiah 42:1, "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, My chosen, in whom my soul delights;

I have put my spirit upon him; He will bring forth justice to the nations."

Mark uses this in the Gospel very simply. His words are quite sparse: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased".

Then, Mark moves Jesus quickly through the Temptation – there is no interaction with the Devil, no quotes flung between them from the Book of Deuteronomy.

Nevertheless his gospel carries several unmistakably Jewish connotations:

Wilderness is portrayed as "the territory of the devil", a place of temptation, a realm of predatory beasts. We are told that "the spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness". The verb used in the Greek is very strong: literally, the Spirit *threw* him out into the wilderness. There is a significance to the letter "forty": in Jewish history it indicates a time of testing. The Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years; Moses spent 40 days on Mount Sinai. So we can infer that Jesus enters into Satan's territory deliberately, to begin his campaign against the powers of evil – the Devil. The arrest of John the Baptist ends today's passage, on the occasion of the start of the public ministry of Jesus. From now on we are straight into Jesus' ministry.

I will leave you with this thought from today's Gospel passage at the baptism of Jesus: I think it may help us to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, because for me Mark has an implicit awareness of the distinction of the Persons of God. He gives us a simple doctrine of the Trinity: when he mentions the voice of the Father, when the heavens are "torn apart"; and when the dove of the Holy Spirit descends on the person of the Son. Could anyone be a Unitarian, a Jehovah's Witness, after that? Rejoice in our Trinitarian belief, as we journey through Lent. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

The Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the almighty,
maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in on Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,

God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven,
was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. **Amen.**

Intercessions, beginning with the Collect of the first Sunday in Lent

Almighty God,
whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness,
and was tempted as we are, yet without sin:
Give us grace to discipline ourselves,
in obedience to your Spirit;
and, as you know our weakness,
so may we know your power to save;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

May God's people, baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, hold fast to the faith they have professed. May the Holy Spirit come down in power to guide the church and lead her away from temptation. *Lord, in your mercy ... hear our prayer*

We ask that God's love may be victorious over all evil in the world. Where human authority leads people astray and power is wrongly used, may the power of Christ drive away temptation and cleanse the nations with the sacred water of his baptism. We pray for those whose lives, whose health have been compromised by the current pandemic, and we give you thanks for our carers *... hear our prayer*

As the Father rejoiced in the work of the Incarnate Son, may we receive grace to live as those that are pleasing to him at this time. Bless this community of Sandymount, Irishtown and Ringsend, bless its homes and its places of work with the protection of God's love. *... hear our prayer*

Have mercy on those who are in the wilderness places of this world, assailed by the wild beasts of doubt and temptation. Bring them safely through their trouble, feed those who are hungry in their bodies or in their minds and lead them into the way where they may know and embrace your love. *... hear our prayer*

Give rest to all who have passed through the temptations of this life and now are free from all its dangers. Let their praise be joined with the song of the angels who ministered to the Incarnate Lord and now adore him in his glory.... *hear our prayer*

Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
for ever and ever,
Amen.

Dismissal:

God of power,
may the boldness of your Spirit transform us,
may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us,
may the gifts of your Spirit equip us to serve and worship you
now and always;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be with you and remain with you always.
Amen.

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