

Wellspring Fransalian Center for Spirituality

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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the First Sunday of Lent. We began our Lenten Journey with a cross traced in ashes on our foreheads. We listen to the call for repentance, for a change of mind and heart. It is call for the conversion and transformation our life in Christ. We heard the priest or the minister saying, "Repent and believe in the Gospel," as he traced the cross in ashes on our foreheads and we began our journey to conversion and transformation in Christ.

Seeds of fire are in the ashes. In the ancient world where matchboxes, matchbooks, lighters and other sources of fire were not available, people kept the source of fire hidden deep in the ashes. Late in the evening, after cooking and all other activities, where fire was needed, were finished, our ancient wise men and women buried the ember in ashes. Whenever fire was needed, they would move the ashes and blow on the ember and there was fire. This is a beautiful image for our reflection and prayer as we begin the season of Lent. Seeds of our Easter fire are in the Ashes of Ash Wednesday!

We begin our Lenten journey in Ashes. From the ashes of destruction, we make our way to the cross of Christ and beyond it to the fire of easter. Unlike the fire of destruction, we encounter a purifying, life-creating fire that gives light to a dark and despairing world. It is the fire that lights the Paschal candle which proclaims, "the light of Christ." It is the fire that brings us into the light of Christ and lights up our own path. This journey will end in Baptism and the renunciation of the forces of evil for some and for others a renewal of their baptismal promises.

The first reading of today's mass (Genesis 9:8-15), tells us the story of the great flood and the appearance of the rainbow, as a sign of the covenant and the promise of new beginnings. The second reading (1 Peter 3:18-22) speaks of participating in the resurrected life, in the new of life through Baptism. And the Gospel (Mark 1:12-15) speaks of Jesus going into the desert after his baptism, being tempted, rising above the temptations to a new power and strength and coming to call people to repentance and new life in the Kingdom of God.

The first reading of today's mass, from Genesis 9:8-15, tells us the story of the great flood and the appearance of the rainbow, hung colorfully across the sky as a sign of the covenant that God made and the promise of new beginnings. In the Hebrew Bible, the rainbow is a symbol of the Covenant between God and man, a covenant that will never be broken. The rainbow is the

sign of the promise of God's unconditional, invincible, unconquerable, enduring, everlasting, unending, covenant Love - the symbol of God's steadfast and all-embracing Love.

There is much to learn about the rainbow and its symbolism in the history of world religions. Rainbow occurs when sunlight intersects with water droplets – whether that's rain, mist, waves, or a waterfall. Bright sunlight and moisture create a bright rainbow that stands out against a dull, rainy background. A rainbow isn't a solid object – it's a combination of light and moisture. Take a moment to reflect on what this could mean for our spiritual journey.

Native Americans speak of the spirituality of the moist heart. Reflect on what can happen to us with the moist heart and the light of Christ! Lent call us to have a moist heart – a heart of repentance and sorrow for our failures, sins, and shortfalls. Lent leads us to the light of Christ, the Paschal light – the light that dispels darkness and heals our brokenness.

We are facing different types of darkness and brokenness these days – the political and social unrest, breakdown of family systems and values, disintegration of ethical and moral standards, conflict even in our churches between and among our spiritual leaders, tensions between people who follow different spiritual traditions and worship forms, etc.

Our responsorial Psalm (Psalm 25) reminds us that our failures, mistakes and shortfalls of the past can weigh heavily upon us and burden our spirit. People can bring us shame, disgrace, and dishonor. But God's way is a way of compassion. We know God's way can guide us rightly and bring us peace and make us whole. We must accept God's way, God's saving rule, and God's wisdom with abiding trust. In God's way, we find forgiveness, grace and peace. In God, we find a firm and guiding hand, a warm and loving friend, and a strong companion on our journey. God shows the way, and we follow. We seek to know and embrace God's truth and God's life.

This first Sunday of Lent places before us the rainbow, the sign and symbol of the unbreakable covenant that God made with his people. During this Lent, let us keep the rainbow, the symbol of God's steadfast love as our symbol of hope. Let us renew our confidence in God's Promise to send us light into our dark moments, healing for our brokenness, forgiveness for our sinfulness and freedom from our restlessness.

I encourage you to find an image of a rainbow or make one yourself or get one of your children to draw or paint a rainbow and keep it in a place in your house that is easily visible. Let the rainbow inspire you to renew your confidence in God's steadfast and all-embracing love and in his provident care. Take a few moments each day of this week to be still and to reflect on how your day has been. Reflect also on how you have been responding to the call to repentance and change of heart and your need to become more confident and trusting in the provident care of our God of love and compassion.

God bless you and your family.

Fr. Gus Tharappel, msfs

First Sunday of Lent

February 18, 2024

Lent is a time of going very deeply into ourselves...What is it that stands between us and God? Between us and our brothers and sisters? Between us and life, the life of the Spirit? Whatever it is, let us relentlessly tear it out, without a moment's hesitation.
(Catherine Doherty)

Collect

Grant, almighty God,
through the yearly observances of holy Lent,
that we may grow in understanding
of the riches hidden in Christ
and by worthy conduct pursue their effects.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Liturgy of the Word

Prayerfully read the first reading and then read my reflections below and spend a few moments of personal reflection. Do the same with Responsorial Psalm and other readings.

**Those who practice forbearance can overlook failures
and weaknesses of others.**

Genesis 9:8-15

In this excerpt, we have the story of the great flood and the appearance of the rainbow, hung colorfully across the sky as a sign of the covenant that God made and the promise of new beginnings.

The ancient sage, the author of Genesis teaches us that God is committed to the covenant with humanity, and he is willing to forgive and is ready to grant a new beginning.

After the devastating flood, "re-creation" begins. A new covenant is established. Man is once again empowered to give life and govern the earth!

Be grateful for new beginnings. And be mindful of your vocation to participate in God's creative, life-giving activity...Be mindful of your vocation to govern (tenderly care for) the earth!

Psalm 25

This is an acrostic (alphabetic) Psalm – each single verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew Alphabet. Read the Psalm carefully and see how the Psalmist speaks of God as “the way, the truth and the life” and asks God to teach him His “way, truth and life”. Jesus will, years later, speak of himself as the way, the truth, and the life. And we have found Jesus as our way, our truth, and our life.

This Psalm carries for us many insights such as: Mistakes of the past can weigh heavily upon us and burden our spirit. People can bring us shame, disgrace, and dishonor. But God's way is a way of compassion. We know God's way can guide us rightly and bring us peace and make us whole. We must accept God's way, God's saving rule, God's wisdom, with reverence. In God's way, we find forgiveness, grace and peace. In God, we find a firm, guiding hand, a warm, loving friend, a strong companion on our journey. God shows the way, and we follow. We seek to know and embrace God's truth and God's life.

**Your ways O Lord, make known to me
Teach me your paths.
Guide me in your truth and teach me,
For you are God, my savior.**

1 Peter 3:18-22

The original author of this letter was writing to persecuted Christians trying to bolster their faith. To do this, he tries to remind them of their place in a larger history and of God's providence in that history and help them see their present sufferings in a larger context. He draws an analogy between the waters of the flood in the time of Noah and the waters of Baptism. A few people were saved in the ark during the flood. But everyone who goes through the waters of baptism is saved and is able to overcome the powers of evil. The author warns that the waters of baptism as such is no good unless it is accompanied by the pledge to God which proceeds from a good conscience.

Mark 1:12-15

This excerpt from Mark speaks of Jesus going into the desert, being tempted, rising above the temptations to a new power and strength and coming to call people to repentance and new life in the Kingdom of God.

Soon after his Baptism, Jesus goes into the wilderness for forty days. Forty days is just a Hebrew phrase meaning a considerable time and not to be taken literally. Mark tells us that Jesus was being tested during these forty days. One thing that stands out for us in this wilderness experience is that even Jesus in the fullness of the spirit was tempted. If so, it shouldn't be a surprise that we are often tested on our journey of faith. Mark also tells us that Angels ministered to Jesus during this testing time. We have the Holy Spirit and the angels of God to help and support us during our testing and trying times.

From the desert, after being tested, Jesus comes out strong and courageous to proclaim the Kingdom of God and call people to repentance and change of heart. Jesus called them to repent, to turn around because the kingdom of God has come.

As we begin the season of Lent, we hear that call of Jesus to "repent and believe in the Gospel, the good news of God's forgiving Love.

Be Still for a few moments!

Pray for your needs and those of your family and community.

Spiritual Communion

Lord Jesus, I believe in your real presence in the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar. I place myself in your presence and adore you, worship you and glorify you. I am unable to receive you in Holy Communion at Mass today. I hunger and thirst for your way, your truth and your life. Come into my heart Lord and satisfy my hunger and quench my thirst. Bless me that I may give witness to your presence in my life. Amen

Be Still for a few moments!

Saint of the Day, February 18 - Saint Simon or Symeon of Jerusalem and 16 other saints are remembered this day

According to tradition, the first bishop of Jerusalem was James, son of Zebedee, appointed bishop by the Apostles Peter. Simeon of Jerusalem was selected as James' successor after the conquest of Jerusalem. According to tradition, after the martyrdom of James and the conquest of Jerusalem which immediately followed, those apostles and disciples who were still living came together from all directions to discern who was worthy to succeed James. They, unanimously proclaimed Symeon, the son of Clopas, as the worthy person to succeed James. He

was a cousin of Jesus, Clopas being a brother of Joseph. He is also one of those mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as having received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

In the year 66, civil war broke out in Palestine, as a consequence of Jewish opposition to the Romans. The Christians in Jerusalem were warned of the impending destruction of the city and ordered to leave it. Accordingly, that same year, they retired with St. Simeon at their head to the other side of the Jordan, occupying a small city called Pella. After the capture and burning of Jerusalem, the Christians returned and settled among the ruins until the Emperor Hadrian afterwards entirely razed it.

However, the church here flourished greatly, and many Jews were converted by the miracles wrought by the saints. When Vespasian and Domitian had ordered the destruction of all who were of the race of David, St. Simeon had escaped their search; but when Trajan gave a similar injunction, he was denounced as being not only one of David's descendants, but also a Christian, and he was brought before Atticus, the Roman governor. He was condemned to death and, after being tortured, was crucified around the year 107 C.E. According to tradition, he was extremely old, around 120.

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