

Living the Word: Genesis 9.8-17

As Lent begins, we are asked to take a hard look at our own behaviour. When have we failed to love our neighbour as ourselves? When have we acted impulsively or selfishly, speaking harsh words, or been indifferent? When have we let ourselves, and God, down? It is tempting to fall into despair as we realise that these times have been all too frequent. Yet God bears with us and, in his wisdom, helps us to recognise our faults. In Christ, we have access to forgiveness and healing, and so we have cause for hope. We are enabled to find forgiveness and healing through the sacraments. God draws us together in Christ and heals our wounds. If we are able to acknowledge our need of his grace, he will freely supply it. God never turns his face away from his creation, and therefore we have cause to hope. Let us use this Lenten season to renew our relationship with him, confident that he is ready to welcome us.

Our Faith: Fasting and Abstinence

To fast is to do without food; its purpose is to experience the effects of not eating. It also serves to be a penance or a sacrifice - for the purpose of strengthening us. When we don't eat, even for a little while, we get hungry. When we get hungry, we have a heightened sense of awareness. If, when we eat too much, we have a sluggish feeling; when we fast, we have a feeling of alertness. Fasting is a wonderful exercise whenever we want to sincerely ask for an important grace from God. It is not that our fasting "earns" God's attention, but by fasting, we clarify our thinking and our feeling. It is purifying and prepares us to pray more deeply. Abstinence refers specifically to abstaining from meat. Its purpose is to be an act of penance - an act of sacrifice - that helps us grow in freedom to make much bigger sacrifices. By ancient tradition, abstinence is encouraged on Fridays. For vegetarians it might be possible to abstain from a non-meat meal on Fridays, and especially during Lent. It should be noted that many people in this world cannot afford to eat meat or do not have access to it. Part of our abstaining from meat can place us in solidarity with so many of our sisters and brothers around the world.

18th February 2024
First Sunday of Lent



Each year, on the first Sunday of Lent, we read one of the synoptic accounts of the temptations of Jesus in the desert by Satan. Mark's version of the temptation in the desert is much shorter than Matthew's or Luke's. This makes the significance more direct. The same Spirit who descended on Jesus in his baptism now drives him into the desert for forty days. This is a moment of radical confrontation with Satan who wants to frustrate the work of God. The wild beasts represent the danger of the desert, and the angels remind us of the angel who supplied food for Elijah in the wilderness (1 King 19:5-7). In the desert, Jesus faces good and evil, but his obedience brings forth the new people of God where Israel's rebellion had brought death and alienation. In the plan of God, Jesus was not to proclaim the good news of salvation prior to the termination of the Baptist's mission. But now is the time of fulfillment: the reign of God has begun in Jesus and it calls for a radical response: "Repent, and put all your trust in the gospel!" What will you do this Lent to root and deepen your trust in God, the true source of life and hope?

Today's Gospel: St. Mark 1:12-15