



Encountering Christ
Prayerfully preparing for the
Sunday Mass and praying in
particular for our school families



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 21st February 2021 - The First Sunday of Lent

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 21st February 2021 (Mark 1:12-15): Jesus is Tested in the Desert

The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him. After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. "The time has come," he said, "and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News."



3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

Mark's emphasis is distinctly different from that of Matthew and Luke. No details of the testing are given. Rather Jesus' sojourn in the desert seems almost a return to the peace of the Garden of Eden. The desert of Judea, between Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley, is a noble and dignified solitude of smooth, sandstone hills. Nothing grows, of course, but wild camels and the occasional leopard prowl around. There Jesus was 'with the wild animals' as, led by the Spirit, he made his preparation for his mission. In what way was he tested? We may presume that in solitude and prayer he was working out the implications of the Voice from Heaven at his Baptism. How was he to run his course as the beloved Servant of the Lord? Precisely how was he to bring the presence of the Kingship of God into people's lives? The 'forty' is often used in biblical accounts for a period of preparation, as Israel's forty years in the desert, or the forty days between Easter and Ascension which prepared the Apostles for Jesus' leaving them and then for the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. We may use our forty days of Lent to reflect on how we may bring God's presence to bear in and through our lives.

How will you make best use of this time of preparation in Lent?

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



**The Wednesday Word is under the patronage of St Joseph, Patron Saint of Families and Protector of the Church
Within the tradition of the Catholic Church, each Wednesday is dedicated to St Joseph**

WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 21st February 2021



First Reading: *The Covenant with Noah*

Genesis 9:8-15

God spoke to Noah and his sons, "See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast with you: everything that came out of the ark, everything that lives on the earth. I establish my Covenant with you: no thing of flesh shall be swept away again by the waters of the flood. There shall be no flood to destroy the earth again." God said, "Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations: I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth. When I gather the clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will recall the Covenant between myself and you and every living creature of every kind. And so the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh."

Lent is a time when the first reading at Mass really comes into its own. On the Sundays of Lent the Church leads us step by step through the preparation of the People of God for the supreme event of Easter, the Resurrection of Christ. In each year of the three-year cycle of readings the first Sunday starts with the Bible-story before Abraham. This year the Old Testament reading is the promise to Noah that God will never again let a destructive flood devastate the earth. The first thing Noah does on emerging from the ark is to sacrifice to God in thanksgiving for his deliverance. To this God replies with his promise, guaranteed by the reassuring sign of the rainbow (a sort of glorious pathway which binds earth closely to heaven). Each of the covenants God makes with his people emerges from the evil we humans do. There is no pretence in the scriptures; we are fallible, sinful human beings. Time after time it is the human partners of the covenant who fail, and break the relationship with God. Time after time God forgives and offers a covenant again, until he offers the new covenant in the blood of Christ. A good way to start Lent is acknowledging our sin and welcoming God's invitation to start again.

What do you need to change in your life to make a new start with Christ?

Second Reading: *The Pledge of a Good Conscience*

1 Peter 3:18-22

Christ himself, innocent though he was, died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life, and, in the spirit, he went to preach to the spirits in prison. Now it was long ago, when Noah was still building that ark which saved only a small group of eight people 'by water', and when God was still waiting patiently, that these spirits refused to believe. That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has entered heaven and is at God's right hand, now that he has made the angels and Dominations and Powers his subjects.

Lent reaches its climax with the renewal of our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil on Holy Saturday night. This reading begins to prepare for this moment. Noah's emergence to new life from the waters of the Flood (amid devastation and destruction) is compared to, and becomes a symbol of, emergence to new life from the waters of baptism. Water is the source of all life. Just look at the way people so often carry a little water-bottle around with them! However, you don't really appreciate water as the source of life until you have been lost in the desert without any water, getting more and more desperately thirsty and weaker. See a drooping flower revive when it is given a few drops of water! The waters of baptism are a symbol not only of washing away sin, but more importantly of new life in Christ. To 'baptise' means to 'dip' in water. By baptism we are 'dipped' into Christ's death. We emerge from the water soaked through with the risen life of Christ, so that henceforth Christ is our life. This reading encourages us to prepare for the renewal of life at Easter by getting our conscience in good order. This needs thought, commitment and prayer, so that we are ready with 'the pledge of a good conscience'.

Reflect on the meaning of Baptism. What is the best way you can prepare for Easter?

“The waters of baptism are a symbol...
of new life in Christ.”

The Wednesday Word: Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God
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