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First Sunday of Lent - 18 February 2024

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18 February 2024

First Sunday of Lent

Reflection by Michele Purcell

Introduction

Today's readings reassure us of God's ongoing love and support. Armed with this knowledge and the hope that it gives us, we are invited to repent (change our lives), follow the example of Jesus, and embrace the challenge of truly believing the Good News.

Pastoral Note: First Sunday of Lent- Rite of Election by Vincent Glynn

The Rite of Election should normally take place on the First Sunday of Lent. Many dioceses celebrate this rite at the Cathedral in the presence of the Bishop. The rite is celebrated within Mass, after the homily. This Rite closes the period of preparation called the catechumenate. The catechumens will be called 'the elect' or 'illuminandi'- those who will be enlightened in Baptism. (Rite of Christian Initiation RCIA 105-124).

Penitential Act

Use one of the *Roman Missal* texts or this optional litany form:

Lord Jesus, you resisted temptation. Lord have mercy.

You lead us to redemption. Christ have mercy.

You give us the bread of life. Lord have mercy.

Collect

The Oration

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,
God, for ever and ever.

This prayer is first encountered in the tradition as a sixth to seventh century oration for the first Sunday of Lent, a place it retains to this day. This opening collect for the season establishes a framework for pursuing the discipline of the season. In this it states the commonplace yet seeks that this discipline become more and more an

established part of the Christian life. Lent is a 'holy' time. While this holiness is from the penitential emphasis the season lends to the celebration of Sunday itself, more so it is because its reference is the resurrection. The yearly observances are not an end in themselves but serve to heighten our receptivity for the mysteries that God has worked amongst creation. Consequently, the aim of our observances is not simply self-control. Rather it is towards our growth in being able to stand under the paschal mystery and becoming more receptive to the riches wrought by Christ. The annual nature of the cycle is a reminder of our need for ongoing transformation into richer believers, more completely taken up and remade in Christ. Growth in understanding is necessarily complemented by right action. Again, this is more than obedience. Our worthy conduct brings out the effects of the riches hidden in Christ. These are acts of building the reign of God. Their orientation is towards our growth in love.

Acknowledgement

The discussion of the collect, slightly adapted, was composed by Gerard Moore for the Canadian liturgical journal *Celebrate!* (Novalis Press). Our thanks to them for permission to reuse the material.

First Reading

Genesis 9:8-15

After delivering Noah and his family from the flood, God establishes a Covenant with him and with every living creature. God promises never again to destroy Creation. It is a message of hope and of new beginnings through God's faithfulness.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 24(25):4-6, 7b-9

Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.

Today's Psalm is a cry for help which comes from the heart. The Psalmist knows, however, that the Lord is full of goodness and mercy and is ever ready to help those in need.

Second Reading

1 Peter 3:18-22

Peter's letter reminds his community that God once rescued Noah and his family – and God will be faithful to them too in their hour of need. He is writing to support Christians who are under persecution because they refuse to take part in Roman festivals of worship. The risen Jesus will be their source of hope.

Gospel Reading

Mark 1:12-15

Jesus proclaims the Good News from God.

Reflection

Just before the Gospel text for today, we read that Jesus left his hometown of Nazareth to be baptised by John the Baptist in the Jordan River. As he was coming out of the water, Jesus saw the Spirit descending on him 'like a dove', and he heard a voice from heaven saying, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; and with you I am well pleased' (Mark 1:9-11). These two verses reveal the intimate relationship Jesus had with God. He experienced with his senses (sight and hearing) the total love and approval of the God he had come to know as his father. Jesus knew God to be gentle, 'like a dove', and loving and approving of him, 'well pleased' (1:9-11).

This transforming baptismal experience underpins the two events we read about in today's Gospel:

'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' (1:12-13).

and

'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' (1:14-15).

Filled with the assurance of God's love after his baptism, Jesus allowed God's Spirit to drive him out into the wilderness to be tested by 'Satan' – the cosmic force in Mark's Gospel personifying opposition to God's will and Jesus' mission. During this time God never abandons Jesus. He was 'with the wild beasts, and the angels looked after him' (1:12-13).

The company of 'angels' signifies God's divine presence which is constantly with Jesus throughout Mark's Gospel. When Jesus dies, God's presence is indicated – not by angels – but by the many women who were faithful to Jesus standing 'at a distance' witnessing his death (15:40,41).

The final part of today's Gospel tells us that after John the Baptist had been arrested Jesus began to proclaim his own message, 'The kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News' (1:15). This was seemingly a reckless thing to do since Jesus' message was just as confronting to the Jewish and Roman authorities as was John's. Nevertheless, Jesus was serenely determined to speak out boldly – inviting everyone to repent (change their lives) and believe in the Good News.

What is this 'Good News'?

The Good News is that the reign of God has begun right here, right now in the person of Jesus. God's rule had now begun – in the imperfect world of Roman rule, abject poverty, unfair taxes and the corruption of some Jewish leaders. Jesus' announcement that the rule of God had begun was indeed the threat to their power base that the Roman rulers identified. John and Jesus were killed by the Jewish and Roman authorities because they recognised this threat.

The Gospel's presentation of God's reign (or Good News) is very different to that of the Romans – which was a violence-based rule. God's reign is the embodiment of a different reality. Jesus demonstrates God's reign in *powerful compassionate actions*. Jesus embodied God's love here in the world by committing himself to activities such as healing, exorcisms, nurturing and forming a community which supported and respected the poorest, most despised, most feared and invisible people of his time (10:42-45). Jesus began a movement which was still growing when Mark wrote this Gospel about 70 CE.

And right now, in 2024, the Spirit is driving us to embody God in the world, too. God's 'angels' are protecting us too just as they accompanied Jesus years ago.

What we witness and experience in our lives can hold elements of good and evil from time to time. Some things are definitely caused by our own mistakes, but much of what we might have to rejoice in – and sometimes endure – is completely out of our control. And evil things that happen are never the result of God's wishing to punish creation. We followers are to believe in the God Jesus knew – God who is as peaceful as a dove and always loving and accepting and rejoicing in us.

Can we really believe that God is always with us? Can we recognise God's love by noticing and thanking 'the angels' that are sent our way?

How very difficult it is sometimes to accept this teaching about God's enduring love and presence! As I am writing this reflection, it is late December 2023. People all round the world are witnessing the devastating death and utter misery being endured because of wars in Gaza and Ukraine. People are suffering too from other less well-reported conflicts and many natural disasters.

We Christians can do little else but keep our eyes on Jesus. He is still walking into our everyday world crying out,

'The time has come, the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News'.

We can only respond during this Lenten season by taking the desert time to discern what we can do *right now*. We can follow Jesus by changing our lives where we can in order to imitate him in our own lives. There are indeed things that we can do. Each of us needs to identify them. And Lent is a good time to begin discerning. We need to begin again today to stand up for truth, heal others we meet with gentle loving words and actions. We need to *be* the angels God sends to accompany others.

Prayer of the Faithful

Introduction

As we gather as the People of God, we know that Christ is truly present in our assembly. Let us turn, in faith, to God with our needs and the needs of our world.

Petitions

We pray for the leaders of our Church. Under the leadership of Pope Francis may they embrace the synodal journey so that our Church will be one of authentic witness to the Good News.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for leaders of nations who preside over war in many places in the world. May the Holy Spirit bring them to understand that continued violence will be the only result and to repent and work towards real peace.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all leaders in the world's economy. May they be brought to understand through the power of the Holy Spirit, that true prosperity requires justice in all things.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all students that their study will be fruitful and lead to rich contributions to wider society and to our Australian culture.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for our community gathered here that our Lenten journey be truly one of increased prayer, fasting and generosity to assist the poor.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

We pray for all those suffering through grief, illness or domestic dysfunction. May they find peace and strength through the compassionate assistance of those who can help them.

(Pause) Lord hear us OR We pray to the Lord.

Conclusion

God of love, we offer you these needs of our community and our world, along with those unspoken in our hearts, with faith that you will respond. We make this prayer through the power of the Holy Spirit and in the name of Jesus, our Lord.

Amen.

Music selections by Alessio Loiacono and Chris deSilva

Title	AOV1	AOV2	AOVK	CWB	CWBII	GA
Again we keep this solemn fast					285	
Ashes		16				209
Be not afraid	114				653	449
Be with me, Lord (Cox)						52
Be with me, Lord (Haugen)				627	286	53
Be with me, Lord (Joncas)	116					
Blest be the Lord	179					458
Father of mercy, God of consolation				670		
For the faces that I know			137			
Forty days and forty nights					288	
From ashes to the living font					289	
God of mercy and compassion				692	290	302
Grant to us, O Lord				698	291	303
Hear us, almighty Lord (<i>Attende Domine</i>)					292	
Hosea				715		213
I am the bread of life	49			718	509	204
Lord Jesus, as we turn from sin				735	294	
May this Lenten discipline				746	295	
My song is love unknown					325	
O God, creator of us all				764	296	
O Sun of Justice, fill our hearts					178/179	2
On eagle's wings	153				654	452
Praise to you, O Christ, our Saviour	28				587	407
Return to God					298	304
Strong and constant				812		
Take up your cross					612	
The glory of these forty days				825	301	
The kingdom of God					616	
Tree of life					300	307
Title	S&S2					
40 Days	310					

Psalms Selected by Chris deSilva and Angela McCarthy

Psalm 24: *Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.*

	CWB	JOBB	LPB	PM2
Psalm 24	209	pg. 26	pg. 34	pg. 22

Music selections by Michael Mangan

Be with us (FWS) *Based on Ps 90/91* [Gathering, Gifts]

Help me know your ways (FWS) *based on Ps 24 (25)* [Gifts]

To you, O Lord (LCC) *Ps 24 (25)* Children's Lectionary Translation

Create a new heart (FWS) *Based on Ps 50/51* [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

This is the time (TT) [Gathering, Gifts, Recessional]

Lenten acclamation (TT) [Gospel Acclamation]

Lenten gospel acclamation – Mass Jubilee (MJC) [Gospel Acclamation]

Turn back to God (TT/SYJ) [CHILDREN: Gathering, Recessional]