

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT – B

On this first Sunday in Lent we have Mark's very brief account of Jesus being tempted in the desert. All Mark records is: 'The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan.' Perhaps for us the important words are: 'The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent and believe the Good News.' The time has come or is fulfilled because with Jesus beginning his public ministry the whole purpose of the old covenant is being fulfilled, the last age begins so we must believe the message Jesus brings and repent of our sins. In the first reading we listen to God making a covenant with Noah and the whole human race. In the second reading we have elements of an early profession of faith.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Genesis the first book in the Bible and the first book of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Jewish Law. The book's origins are still uncertain, it speaks of mankind's beginnings, 1-11, and then the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob until their arrival in Egypt. The book is a composite of three documents, the Yahwist, (J), the Elohist, (E) and the Priestly, (P), that go to make up the book of Genesis whose authorship, although attributed to Moses, is unknown. The Yahwistic tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine. The Elohist tradition (*elohim* means God) is more sober in style with an exacting moral code and an insistence on the distance separating human beings from God. The Priestly tradition contributes laws and is particularly concerned with the organization of the sanctuary, with sacrifices and festivals and with the person of Aaron, the priest, and his descendants. This is the tradition of the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Yahwist and Elohist were possibly written down in the reign of Solomon c.950 BC, whereas the Priestly was not codified until the Exile, 587-538, and added to the Pentateuch after the return from exile.

The reading, 9.8-15, tells of the covenant God makes with Noah after the flood. Unlike the covenant God made with Abraham, which was limited to his descendants and the Sinai covenant, which was confined to Israel alone, this covenant made with Noah, the sign of which is the rainbow, is eternal and involves the whole of creation. This covenant is part of the new order established by God. In the beginning man was blessed and was consecrated lord of creation. Now man is blessed anew but his rule is no longer tranquil, man will be at war with the beasts and with his fellows. Man must wait for 'the last days' for the peace ushered in by the Christ.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 24.4-9, is an alphabetical psalm, a prayer in time of danger. If we wish to avoid danger especially the danger which ensues following the loss of God friendship this psalm tells us what to do and what to pray for to regain God's friendship.

The **Second Reading** is from the first letter of St Peter. There is doubt about the authorship of the Petrine letters because not a lot is known about Peter's latter years and though Peter's Greek in the letter is unsophisticated it is thought to be too accurate and fluent for a Galilean fisherman. The purpose of the letter is to help its readers' faith in time of trial. Their model is Christ and Christians must suffer patiently like him when their trials are due to their faith and to their saintly lives, In return for evil they must offer charity, they must give their obedience to the civil authority and show gentleness to all.

The reading, 3.18-22, contains elements of an ancient profession of faith including: Christ's death, his descent to hell, his resurrection, his enthronement at the right hand of God and the judgement of the living and the dead. The preaching of Christ can be taken either for salvation or punishment and the 'spirits in prison' refer either to the wicked drowned in the Flood or the fallen angels. This teaching is the chief biblical source for the doctrine of Jesus' Descent into Hell. The waters of the flood, through which Noah and his family passed to safety by means of the ark, prefigured the waters of baptism: 'In it (the Ark) only a few, that is eight souls, were saved through water. It is the baptism corresponding to this water that saves you now.' It is through the waters of baptism that we are able to share in the fruits of Christ's resurrection.