

HOMILY - 1ST SUNDAY OF LENT "B" 2/18/18

I am not sure which season it is where more resolutions are broken – the beginning of the New Year or Lent. We are usually motivated at these times by a sincere desire to make changes in our life. We begin well but often after a short time we find out what we wanted to do was a lot harder than we had planned on. So gradually we begin to waver on our commitment and very often we never complete our chosen resolution. That is when old fashion “Catholic guilt” may take over.

Why is that? It certainly doesn't imply that the person making the resolution is insincere or poorly motivated. Nor does it imply that the person is not spiritual or committed enough. What the problem might be is that the resolution is way too difficult to achieve. In the enthusiasm to better our lives we have set a path for disappointment and failure. All I can think of is the expression: “Keep it simple, stupid”.

During these days of Lent we might do well to see this time as a way to go back to the basics, to breathe new life into our Christian identity, to make a fresh start. Lent is that time in the Church's liturgical calendar where we are encouraged to reflect upon the great covenant God made with his people. “I will be your God and you will be my people.” That great covenant was offered and renewed with each of us in the day of our baptism. We became children of God and were commissioned to be a priestly and prophetic people. Lent gives us the time to reflect upon our special relationship with God and with all our neighbors.

The story of Noah was all about a fresh start. Despite the devastating flood Noah and his family and animals were safe because they stayed in the Ark. The rainbow was a sign of a new beginning and a sign to all the human race of God's promise to bring salvation to those who repent and are faithful to God.

Lent can also be a time to ask ourselves if we are still in the Ark. Lent is not about God's fidelity but about our own. We are encouraged to revive our Christian life and our commitment to follow Jesus. The Church offers us three very specific ways to make our Lent a real fresh start for ourselves – prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Stay simple! No matter if you are alone, a couple, or a family – make prayer an essential part of your day. This might take the form of praying before and after meals, giving a blessing to each other before going out the door for school for work, or for shopping. We might find that fasting could mean spending less time watching television, surfing the internet, talking and texting on our smart phones. It might mean drinking responsibly, eating healthier and exercising more. Almsgiving might mean less buying of non-essential material things, sharing my treasure with the church or worthy charities.

Our Sundays of Lent this year center on the theme of covenant. There is the old covenant that is made, renewed and described over and over in the Old Testament. There is also the new covenant given to us in Jesus Christ. We were made part of that new covenant when we were baptized. Christ's covenant is like that of a faithful friend, for better or worse, in sickness and health, for richer or poorer. Can we say the same for our response?

Prayer, fasting and acts of charity are ways of assessing and reviving our fidelity to

Christ. The Lord is faithful to us. Are we faithful to him? Are we in the ark or trying to swim the waters around us alone?

Lent opens the door for us to enter the ark once again. Here, from within the ark, we can behold the rainbow sign of the Eucharist telling us that we are never alone – we can begin again.