

**Homily February 22, 2015 Lenten Week 1 B**  
**Genesis 9:8-15; 1 Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:12-15**

In today's gospel Jesus' message was short and simple. Just one verse of today's four-verse Gospel contains the whole message: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good news."

We know that Jesus encountered all kinds of obstacles when He proclaimed God's kingdom. Mark mentions, "The Spirit drove (him) out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan." Any movement from God's Spirit always runs head on into a counter movement from Satan. Matthew and Luke provided three specific temptations that Jesus faced in the desert. Mark, on the other hand, left it up to his readers to fill in the blanks.

And what Jesus learned in the desert prepared Him to faithfully carry out God's plan for His messianic ministry. He understood that His Baptism and discernment in the wilderness would lead to confrontation, suffering and death.

The good news He proclaimed would meet stiff resistance not only from Satan but from those humans who clung to power; King Herod, the religious leaders in Jerusalem, the Romans and even John's own disciples.

So Jesus headed north to Galilee to the land of the gentiles, to His own people and various hill country villages, and the towns near the sea. This was where He began his ministry of preaching and healing.

Those early days are good ones for Jesus as He had a chance to gather followers, to work out the details of his ministry before He'd have to go south to Judea where the centers of power and resistance to His message were strongest.

And our second reading closely echoes Jesus' call.

We don't really know much about who wrote 1st Peter but a lot of his theological imagery seems to be based on a non-canonical book, 1 Enoch, a text familiar to the people in his community.

For example, because the author of 1 Enoch speaks about the fallen angels having been imprisoned by God because of their disobedience, the author of 1 Peter presumes that Jesus, in His risen form, also delivered his message of God's kingdom among us to those "spirits in prison."

And we can't miss his emphasis on baptism. Some scholars are convinced that 1 Peter was originally a baptismal homily that someone eventually changed into a letter format for wider circulation.

Along that theme of baptism, Peter reminded his readers of that earlier covenant God established after the flood with Noah and his family. Never again would God destroy all bodily creatures. God gives the rainbow as the sign of this covenant.

So just as Noah had been saved from the waters of the flood so Jesus was offering salvation through repentance and the waters of baptism.

This would have been shocking news to those who heard this message 2000 years ago! They were being called to "repent" -- to turn away from their previous paths -- and to turn toward the path now proclaimed by Jesus.

They were faced a critical decision.

We here today on this first Sunday of Lent also face a crucial decision.

Are we willing to examine attitudes that have consciously or unconsciously arisen from our materialistic and individualistic culture regarding material prosperity and career fulfillment, relationships and physical gratification, indifference to the needy and marginalized, callousness regarding the world in which we live?

Lent is much more than simply giving up a few favorite indulgences. It is an invitation for total renewal of our hearts. Our hearts will be renewed to the degree we open them to God, seek God's grace, turn way from our sins and embrace the good news proclaimed by Jesus.