

Sunday February 21st, 2021

First Sunday of Lent Parishioner Reflection

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Imagine what life on Noah's ark was like - every day the same, nowhere to go, cooped up with people and animals in overcrowded conditions, worried about food supplies, anxious about the future. The people on board didn't know how it was going to end; they were forced to simply trust and obey the authority of Noah. When they emerged from the ark there was joy, symbolized in the rainbow - the sign of God's promise of covenant love with them that would last forever. They learned that whatever trial or ordeal they had to go through, they could trust God's loving relationship with them. They disembarked to become privileged participants in a complete renewal of life on earth.

God's promise of covenant love - his promise to be in a relationship of mutual belonging with us - is embodied in our baptism. God promises that he will be our God and we will be his people. It is what we can count on, the source of our strength and hope, as we experience the trials and challenges of today and live through a time that may seem like a wilderness. Our baptism is our deepest identity; we are beloved children of God.

Jesus himself went into the wilderness, where he was tested and tempted for forty days, right after he had been baptized by John. The Father's voice announced Jesus' deepest identity, "You are my Son, the Beloved; in you I am well pleased." This time in the wilderness strengthened Jesus and clarified for him how he was to live his mission, how he was to preach and heal and ultimately give his life for our salvation, as God's Beloved.

Like Jesus, we can be tempted during this wilderness time to want to seize control, to do something powerful and dramatic to effect change. But what Jesus learned in the desert was surrender to the Father's will, surrender to the Father's timing and way of love. Jesus' deep trust in the Father and his awareness of his deepest identity as the Beloved of God was strengthened during those forty days. He emerged from the desert ready to be responsive to the Father's prompting in every situation. He learned his need to be in constant communion with God in prayer. As he came back to Galilee Jesus proclaimed with deep confidence, "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the good news."

Let us pray for one another, especially while we are so physically isolated, that this time of Lent, this wilderness experience, will lead us to a deeper trust in God's covenant love with each one of us. Each of us is God's beloved, called to radical surrender and trust in God. May we have the grace to listen deeply during these days to the Father's voice of

love and respond with generosity to how God wants to use us to renew and restore our world.