

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 1st SUNDAY OF LENT
Genesis 9: 8-15 Psalm 25 I Peter 3: 18-22 Mark 1: 12-15
By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

PRENOTE:

If your parish is engaged in the Rite of Christian Initiation and is using the A Cycle of Readings, we have posted reflections for those Sundays on our webpage. (Go to <https://PreacherExchange.com> and click on the “First Impressions” tab.) There you will also find some thoughts for Ash Wednesday. Blessed Lent!

I was at the cash register in the supermarket the other day and the young man who was ringing up my items had a name tag that read, Noah. I wonder how many people noticed his name and linked it with the Flood we read about in Genesis? Even people with just a passing knowledge of the bible know about Noah – his family, the ark, the two-by-two animals on board, the destruction of the wicked, the sparing of the good and then – the rainbow. At least that’s what flooded into my mind as Noah was weighing my tomatoes.

The story of Noah certainly touches the religious memory of the devout. We remember that in the beginning verses of Genesis chaos and the brooding darkness pervaded. Then God began the work of creation and at the end of each day of creating we are told, God “saw how good” it was. Finally, after creating humans, “God looked at everything God had made and found it very good” (1:31). Then sin entered the story and spread its corrupting influence throughout humanity.

The biblical author borrowed and adapted a Babylonian myth and used it to convey some important biblical messages: God is not indifferent to human injustice and sin and, while God punishes evil, God does not destroy those who are good. The waters of the Flood recall the original chaos (1:1) and suggest that once again God is going to bring about something new. Human beings did their best to mess up the order and goodness God established from the beginning; but God, not humans, is in charge and has determined to preserve and continue creating good. Hence the creatures and humans are saved in the ark. And more.

God establishes a covenant with Noah and future generations. Biblical covenants happen between two unequal parties; both make promises to each other about their

future relations. What is distinctive about the covenant in today's Genesis reading is that only God voices the agreement, not only with Noah and his people, but with future generations – which includes, “all living things.” God is making a free choice to be faithful and gracious to all creatures and promises “never again” to punish evil doers by another flood.

God stands with and protects all creation. But sin will again show its destructive effects on the human community and the rest of God's creation. How will God defeat sin and bring about still another new beginning when humans again turn away from God? – and they will turn away from God! God eliminated the flood option. The author of Genesis tells us when God “brings clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds,” God will remember the covenant God has made with humans and will not destroy us with another flood. Instead, God has another plan.

St. Peter, in our second reading, summarizes how God deals with human beings' tendency to fall back into sin. There will be another flood; not the kind that covered the earth, but the one that washes over us to take away our sins – baptism. Once again God has taken the initiative and established a covenant with us, Saint Peter tells us, “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Through water “the eight” were saved in the time of Noah; those waters prefigured baptism by which we are now being saved.

We begin Lent with strong baptismal allusions. We are preparing catechumens for baptism at Easter. We, the already-baptized, are also being graced in Lent to prepare ourselves for a renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter. This Lent, through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we ready ourselves to be attentive so as to experience, once again, God's graciousness at this moment of our lives.

What gift has God got in mind for us this Lent? – A deepened spirit of prayer? A renewed energy for our on-going commitments? A new vision for how to live the Christian life in our present circumstances? A dramatic shift to a different form of discipleship? A fuller sense of joy and gratitude for what we already have from God's hands? A letting-go of resentments and past hurts? A life dedicated to caring for and fostering the renewal of the planet (“all living creatures”)? – Who knows? But God took the first steps in making a covenant with us and God will live up to the promise to stand with us and constantly renew us through the waters

that saved us from sin and began our journey with Christ and one another.

The initiation of Jesus' public ministry began with his baptism in the Jordan. Jesus has just emerged from his own "Flood" – his baptism. The Spirit "drove" Jesus into the desert. Now Mark tells us of Jesus' temptation. (Mark's narrative of the temptations is succinct. Let's respect his telling and not go looking into Luke and Matthew for more details.)

From the destruction of the Flood, God brings about a new creation and a new relationship between God and humans begins. God makes a promise to stay in the relationship with us; not to destroy creation again. Immediately after today's gospel account John the Baptist is arrested and will be put to death. Sin and chaos seem to have the upper hand. But a new moment begins again as Jesus sets out to preach, "the kingdom of God is at hand." Even when Christ is crucified and hope seems dashed, God raises him and, through him, us to new life. Is there any defeat that God cannot draw new life from? Who can ultimately defeat God's will for our good and the good of all creation?

God has not stayed aloof from our world and has, in Christ, joined us as we struggle against sin and the forces of chaos. No flood, no destructive forces, not even death itself, can overcome God's active and saving presence in the world. God's covenant with Noah and his descendants reminds us that God also wants to continue working with us to save what God has created and is good.

So, we can ask ourselves: What is our responsibility, as people in covenant with God, for preserving and renewing what has suffered the results of sin? How are we responsible for the safety and well-being of others? What can we do to help the poor of the world overcome disease and hunger? How are we to care for and renew the natural environment itself? (Cf. "Justice Bulletin Board" below) How can we protect human life in all its stages? How can we diminish violence in society? What do we need to do to assure the dignity of each person?

How, in other words, can we fulfill our part in the covenant with God which was first struck with Noah and renewed in perpetuity with us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

QUOTABLE

It is safe to say that Lent has no meaning apart from the Paschal Mystery. The prayer, fasting and almsgiving we do during Lent have an Easter purpose. We do not fast during Lent because fasting is good for our health, like a workout in the gym. Rather, fasting helps us to realize our dependence; it helps us become aware of the needs of others; it empties us so that we can be filled with God's gifts. We give alms for the same reason – to increase our awareness of the poverty of others, to become more detached from things and more focused on God. The prayers we offer during Lent are prayers of repentance, prayers of reparation. That is important, but most important of all, we pray that God may “bring the image of [his] Son to perfection within us” (Preface of Lent I, P8). For ours is a journey of hope, a fitting time to “ascend to the holy mountain of Easter”

—Corinna Laughlin and Jennifer Kerr Breedlove in 2009 SOURCEBOOK: FOR SUNDAYS, SEASONS AND WEEKDAYS. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications), page 89.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. “Faith Book” is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Genesis reading:

God said to Noah...

“See, I am now establishing my covenant with you
and with your descendants after you
and with every living creature that was with you:
all the birds, and the various tame and wild animals
that were with you and came out of the ark.”

Reflection:

The covenant God made with Noah and his descendants states that God wants to continue working with us to care for what God has created. God's good purpose not only includes humans and their care, but also all of the natural world which the

Book of Genesis tells us, God called “good.” What God calls good we must also treasure and protect.

So, we ask ourselves:

- What can I do to protect human life in all its stages?
- What must I do to protect the environment so that it will continue to be a blessing for generations who follow us?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

“See, I am now establishing my covenant with you...and with every living creature...”(Genesis 9:8)

“In the Book of Genesis, where we find God's first self-revelation to humanity there is a recurring refrain: "AND GOD SAW IT WAS GOOD". After creating the heavens, the sea, the earth and all it contains, God created man and woman. God entrusted the whole of creation to the man and woman, and only then—as we read—could he rest "from all his work"

“Adam and Eve's call to share in the unfolding of God's plan of creation brought into play those abilities and gifts which distinguish the human being from all other creatures. Made in the image and likeness of God, Adam and Eve were to have exercised their dominion over the earth with **wisdom and love**” (Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation: Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Peace Day, 1/1/90). Read Pope John Paul's entire statement at:

<http://conservation.catholic.org/ecologicalcrisis.htm>

Did you know?

· The US Conference of Catholic Bishops sponsors “**The Environmental Justice Program (EJP)**. EJP seeks to *educate* and *motivate* Catholics to a deeper reverence and respect for God's creation, and to *engage* Catholics in activities aimed at dealing with environmental problems, particularly as they affect the poor.

· **There is such a thing as “Ecological Spirituality.** “No one is holy who is not first good. Disciples who are spiritually alive, actively seek to discern God's will and act as collaborators with God. Today, this must include a reassessment of what

Genesis means when it tells humankind to subdue the earth and have dominion over all living things on it. Can we be collaborators with our Creator if we want only pollute air, pile up atomic waste, denude our forests, and foul our rivers and lakes? No. A serious spirituality begins with a deep conversion from callous tearing of whatever we want from the earth to a caring stewardship.”

· Our Bishops’ approach to climate change reflects three central and traditional ideas: the **virtue of prudence**, the **pursuit of the common good**, and the **duty to stand with and for the poor and vulnerable**. Read more at:

What I can do:

· Study the US Catholic Bishops’ Environmental Justice Program, *Caring for God’s Creation*: Make environmental awareness and choices a part of your spirituality.

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates’ names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina’s, “People of Faith Against the Death Penalty.” If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Warren Gregory #0156518 (On death row since 5/18/93)
- David Lynch #0251740 (5/27/93)
- Jeffrey Barrett #0021418 (6/1/93)

Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

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