

First Sunday of Lent
Waters of Judgment and Salvation

The readings of Lent are especially rich. If we listen to them carefully and mediate upon what they say, they can prepare us for the coming feast of Easter by teaching us how to observe the discipline Lent. Accordingly, during the season of Lent I will dedicate my columns to explaining these readings in the hope that these readings will strengthen your Lenten resolve.

Noah and the Flood (Gen 9:8-15): Today's first reading is taken from the familiar story of Noah and Flood. The waters of the flood were God's judgment on a sinful world in which all had gone astray, except Noah. Despite the sinfulness of humanity, God does not abandon his creation. Rather, he uses Noah as a means to restore creation to its original goodness. The waters of the flood wash away an evil generation; and God establishes a covenant with Noah in order to restore creation to its original goodness.

The Waters of Baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22): Today's second reading is taken from the First Letter of St. Peter. It develops the theme of the flood further in order to explain the meaning of our baptism. Just as the waters of the flood washed away the wickedness of the world in Noah's day, so the flood waters of our baptism washed away the sin of Adam and Eve—the sin we call “original sin.” That sin is the power of Sin and Death over our lives that keeps us from God. It is that Sin that Christ conquered by his death and resurrection so that we might enjoy eternal life with God. It was at our baptism that we entered the New Covenant God made through the death and resurrection of his Son.

Jesus' Testing in the Wilderness (Mark 1:12-15): In today's Gospel, St. Mark presents us with a shortened form of the temptation story. Although brief, this narrative highlights Jesus' victory over Satan. Whereas Adam was disobedient, Christ was obedient; and because he was obedient to the point of death, he became the head of a new humanity to which we belong through our baptism.

Summary: Today's readings highlight the great themes of our redemption: God's judgment over Sin; the cleansing waters of baptism whereby we are made a new creation in Christ; the obedience of Christ who become the head of a new creation through his life-giving death and resurrection. As we begin this Lenten journey, let us renew our baptismal promises through almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Since the ashes we received on Wednesday were the outward sign of our desire to repent and believe in the gospel, let us use this Lenten Season to turn from our old way of life to Christ.

Father Matera

This Thursday I begin my Lenten Series on “**Praying and Living the Psalms**” in the Lower Church Hall, 7:30 PM. This first session will introduce to the Psalms and how to use them in your prayer.