



First Sunday of Lent

† Sunday 18th February 2018

In England and Wales

Cycle of Prayer – Candidates for the Sacraments

Keynote: Jesus invites us to repent, to believe the Good News!

Book of Genesis 9: 8-15

The sign of a rainbow in the sky after rain is a beautiful sight, and for the People of Israel the rainbow was a sign of the lasting Covenant between God and the people. As God said to Noah and his family: *'See, I establish my Covenant with you, and with your descendants after you... Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you, and every living creature with you for all generations: I have set my (rain) bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth.'* Astronauts looked down upon the earth from space expressed their sense of wonder; many earthbound travellers have experienced a deep sense of awe for the earth and the environment. Elsewhere the writer of Genesis says *'God saw all that was made, and indeed it was very good.'* This week we might, at some point, just stand aside from the haste of our busy daily living to contemplate the wonders of God and of Creation.

Responsorial Psalm 24 (25) – A prayerful song for forgiveness

First Letter of Peter 3: 18-22

The Apostle Peter reminds his readers that *'Christ himself, innocent though he was, had died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life.'* To understand this we need to realise that Peter saw God's action in saving Noah and his family from the great floodwaters, as a 'type' or sign of baptism. *'That water,'* says Peter *'is a type of the baptism which saves you now and which is not the washing of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.'* Baptism described by the early Fathers of the church, as 'Illumination' seems to offer us hope in an otherwise at times, dark, even threatening, world. Did they see the light of the rainbow in the sky after the storm, as a type of the enlightenment that comes with Christian faith at baptism? Maybe it is time to renew our own baptismal pledge of faith made in good conscience.

Gospel according to Mark 1: 12-15

Our evangelist, Mark, describes the temptation event, in just a couple of sentences. *'The Spirit drove Jesus out into the wilderness and he remained there for forty days, and was tempted by Satan.'* It is almost as if for Mark, the details are not important for he quickly presses on with his main story. *'Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God (euangelion).'* Temptation is a very personal matter for us, as it was for Jesus. Sometimes God may drive us into the spiritual wilderness, or we ourselves may seek solitude in the spirit, to renew and deepen our life in God. Whether 'pushed' or freely chosen, the season of Lent is an opportunity to hear again the words of Jesus as he announces the Gospel of freedom, *'The time has come,'* Jesus said *'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'*

© Peter J Harrison 2018

Note: The Rite of Election may be celebrated and Sunday Readings from Year A may be used.