

Homily
February 18, 2024
1st Sunday of Lent
16:42 – 28:37

That is the shortest Gospel we hear over a three-year period. It was here and it's done!

It is so indicative of the Gospel according to Mark, which is sixteen chapters that are pell-mell heading towards the Passion. Scripture Scholars often refer to it as "An Extended Passion Narrative." Every bit of it just keeps moving and moving and moving. It's almost breathless.

So, if you ever want to read a Gospel straight through, this is the one. Just fasten your seatbelt before you do it.

Jesus Christ, the one whom we call the Son of God, according to Mark's Gospel account. The one who is the Savior, the bringer of a new Covenant, as we hear of the Last Supper in this account. And the one who sends forth those who will proclaim the gift of this new Covenant.

But let's go back to the very first Covenant, that of Noah. We know the story of Noah. We know that God challenged him, at least according to one comedian, whether or not he could tread water.

He does what the Lord asks. He gathers the animals. He gathers the seven other people with him. They survive the flood. They wait for the waters to subside. And when they do and the dove returns with a fig leaf, they know the danger has passed.

They emerge to this First Reading, where God reaches out with his voice and says to Noah and his family, ***I am making a new Covenant with you.*** The Covenant is this: LIFE. Not only will you never see life destroyed again, for the corruption that had been caused by humanity, but you are to do what was in Eden. Go forth, multiply. Fill the earth and subdue it. You are to complete what was begun back then.

God makes a promise that they are going to be able to do it. But then he says that in this Covenant there will be a sign that will remind you and me of this Covenant that I have initiated: the bow in the sky. That bow, which will not only represent all colors, but the wonder of life itself. You see it. Recall what I have given you and asked you to do. I see it and I will support life and never destroy it again by water.

This First Covenant has the same basic components as all Covenants. God initiates it. The Covenant relationship is not equal because God is God. And guess what. We're not. Beyond that, it's very clear that God does this out of love. He makes a promise, there is an invitation to response and there is a sign to remind humanity of this Covenant.

The Second Covenant is the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham: whom God called into Covenant out of Ur of the Chaldeans. Who promises to make of him great nations, many people. Who simply asks that he live faithfully, as he always has. Be in relationship with this new God, the God of the Covenant with Abraham. And there is to be a sign. That sign is all the peoples and nations that will come forth from him. Once again God initiates out of love, makes a promise, encourages a response and has a sign.

And then there's the Mosaic Covenant, centuries later. Where Moses encounters the Lord on the mountain. And God initiates through the fiery bush. Moses steps forward and God says, "*Go no further. No. This is holy ground.*" Take off your sandals. I am God and you're not. But I care for you and through you I care for the Hebrew people who are enslaved. This Covenant that I will make with you. It will be fulfilled on Sinai, many days later, after the release from Egypt.

It's a Covenant in which God promises, *I will be your God. And you will be my people, chosen.* In that choosing I give you the Ten Commandments and the whole of the Law by which to live. What will be the sign of this Covenant? Something rather odd for us: circumcision. We're not

of the ancient Middle East. That was important at that time. And this was a sign that God's chosen are bound as a people to one God. That Covenant went on for centuries.

And then there is the Davidic Covenant. David. God makes a Covenant with David that will allow David's lineage to endure. He promises that. The only thing He says they must do is that those who follow David in his lineage must live faithfully the Covenant. The Law of Moses.

We know that Jesus Christ is a descendant of David through Joseph and Mary. What does that mean? All those Covenants that have gone before are now fulfilled in Jesus.

They are not abrogated, my brothers and sisters. Go back and read Chapters 7, 8 and 9 in Paul's account to the Romans. And he says no, they are not abrogated. They still exist. And some will follow them.

All of creation is included in the Noachic Covenant. The descendants of Abraham are included and that still goes on. The Mosaic Covenant still exists for our Jewish brothers and sisters, and we are descendants of that. And the Davidic Covenant, oh yes. **Jesus**, the Son of God, a descendant of David.

What is God's promise? We heard of it in the Second Reading. Baptism! Which includes us in this Covenant in Jesus Christ. That's the first sign of it. The waters bringing us together - beyond a flood, now life-giving. But more so, God promises, in Christ, *"I will give you a way of living and ask you to live it, to make a difference in the world."*

"I'm going to give you a sign that endures, that endures every second of every day until eternity." (Gesturing toward the altar) The sign of the Covenant, the Eucharist. Recall the words that the priest prays and leads us in, over the cup - the Blood. He took a cup and he said, "Take this all of you and drink from it. For this is the cup of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal

Covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many (that means All) for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this in memory of me.”

My brothers and sisters, every time we gather here, or anyplace else in the world, to celebrate Eucharist -- no matter the language, no matter the culture, no matter how few or how many -- the sign of the Covenant that we have in Christ is before us. And not only is it a sign upon the altar, it becomes food for our journey. Spiritual food to live out the gift that we have been given in Christ.

That’s why it’s so special. For so many reasons, but especially today, because it’s a constant reminder that we are bound to God in Christ Jesus.

We are about to celebrate a ritual called the Rite of Sending – to Election for those who are not baptized and to Recognition to those who are baptized. It is rooted in this Covenant, as you will hear. As we do this with these people, let us rejoice with them.