

# Our Sunday Readings

WHAT DO WE HEAR?

GENESIS 9:8-15  
 PSALM 25:4-9  
 I PETER 3:18-22  
 MARK 1:12-15

## Beginnings



### Prayer

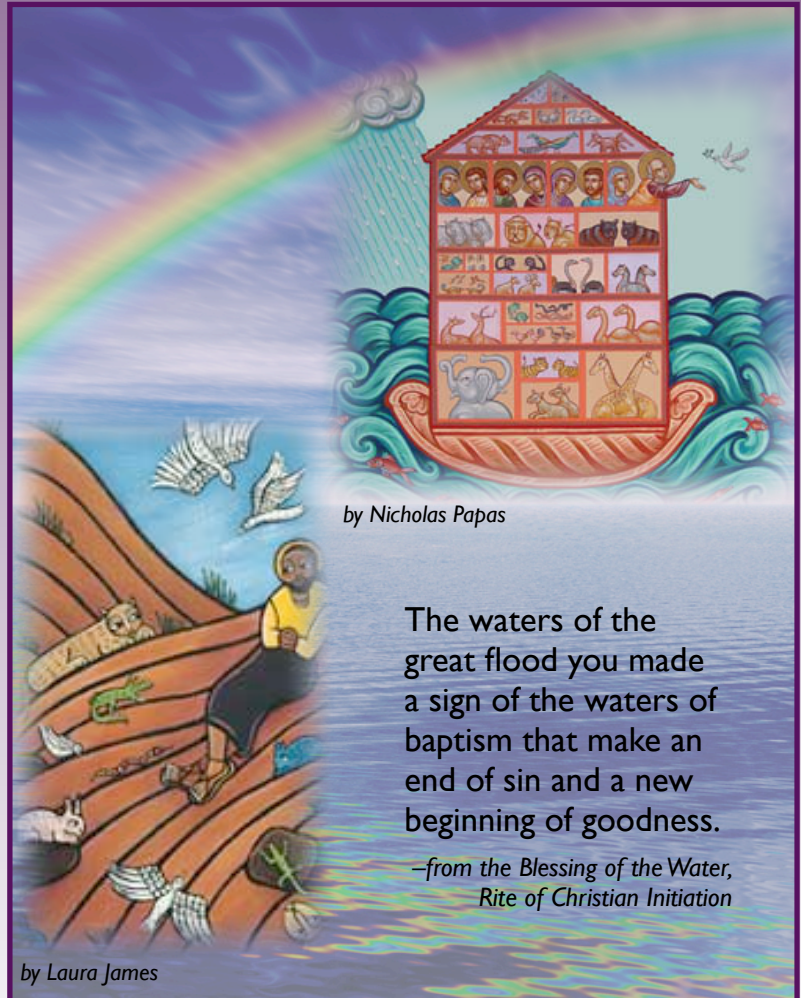
My God,  
 I am sorry for my sins with all  
 my heart.  
 In choosing to do wrong and  
 failing to do good,  
 I have sinned against you  
 whom I should love above all  
 things.

I firmly intend,  
 with your help,  
 to do penance,  
 to sin no more,  
 and to avoid whatever leads  
 me to sin.

Our savior Jesus Christ  
 suffered and died for us.  
 In his name, my God, have  
 mercy.

Amen.

—Act of Contrition



by Nicholas Papas

The waters of the  
 great flood you made  
 a sign of the waters of  
 baptism that make an  
 end of sin and a new  
 beginning of goodness.

—from the Blessing of the Water,  
 Rite of Christian Initiation

by Laura James

# Understanding the Word

knowledge of scripture is knowledge of Christ



by Joseph Anton Koch

## The First Readings of Lent

During the season of Lent the Old Testament readings don't connect thematically with the Gospel passages but stand alone. They are stories from the most significant events in the history of Israel. These stories are a sketch of salvation history, of how God has patiently drawn wayward, sinful humankind into eternal life.

### GENESIS 9:8-15

#### A second creation

The first story of creation tells how God put form to "the abyss," a mass of water that symbolized both chaos and emptiness. In the story of the flood God uses water to cleanse the earth of sinful humankind. Sadly, this renewed creation isn't free of sin, either.

#### A vow of mercy

After the creation of the first human beings God watched as people's sins increased and spread across the earth. Even though the flood washed away the worst of the evil, sin remains.

God's promise never to cause such complete destruction is a pledge of mercy in the face of humankind's persistent sinfulness. God accepts the weak state of his human creation and decides to respond with patience and forgiveness. God will find a different way to renew the work of his hand.

### I PETER 3:18-22

#### For the sake of righteousness

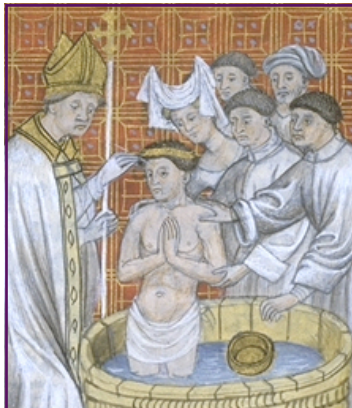
This letter seems to have been written to people who were being persecuted because they had become Christian. The author writes that they should endure such hardship just as Christ did. They should be the righteous ones who, like Christ, might through their goodness lead others to God (v.18).

#### Constantly saving

This passage speaks of moments within salvation history, which is ongoing.

- God saves Noah and his family (and by delaying the flood, God tries to save others who might see the ark and take warning)
- The risen Christ preaches to those who are in a sort of underworld; these beings rejected God but might yet repent
- Baptism is God's instrument of salvation today; through it the believer is brought into Christ's death and resurrection

Baptism is partly our request that God help us to see with new eyes. We want a new consciousness, a new way of seeing our world so that we will act with confidence and courage.



### MARK 1:12-15

#### A trial of strength

Right before this passage Mark describes Jesus' baptism: God declares that Jesus is his son and sends his spirit upon Jesus. This Spirit then compels Jesus to go into the desert where he must face whatever confronts him.

**Forty** refers to a long, full length of time. Moses and the Israelites wandered in the desert for forty years learning to trust in God. Jesus must also learn to trust in God while alone and in a dangerous place.

Although Jesus is **tempted by Satan**, Mark doesn't dwell on it. Given that Jesus emerges from the desert to begin his public ministry, we know that God's son was victorious over whatever testing he faced.

There are two explanations of the significance of the **wild beasts**. They could be hostile, another danger Jesus faces. If instead we're to imagine that Jesus subdues these beasts, then they represent God's kingdom in which wild creatures become tame.

Mark doesn't tell us that Jesus fasted. On the contrary, **angels ministered to him**, which alludes to a story in which an angel feeds the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 19:5-8).

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have we ever strongly felt God's anger? God's mercy? God's patience?
2. How do we wish God would respond to evil in our world? in us?
3. Do we imagine Jesus thinking and acting in a human or superhuman way while he was in the desert?
4. Have we ever felt the Spirit driving us? How willing were we to follow the Spirit? What happened?
5. When have we felt alone and threatened? Did anyone minister to us?
6. What examples can we give of difficult times in which we trusted in God?
7. What does this Gospel passage tell us about the demands of Jesus' divine sonship? What demands are placed on us as people who are baptized?
8. When have we struggled to see and do the right thing? What made it difficult?

WHAT INSIGHT, PRAYER, OR ACTION WILL BE PART OF MY WEEK?

February 26, 2012 / First Sunday of Lent

**Guiding Questions for the First Reading (Genesis 9:8-15)**

1. To whom does God make this promise?
2. Why does God choose a “bow in the clouds” to be the sign of his promise?
3. To whom does the bow serve as a reminder?
4. What must people do?
5. How did God use water? Why did God use it this way?
6. Why might God have made this promise now?
7. What else catches your attention?

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February 26, 2012 / First Sunday of Lent

**Guiding Questions for the Gospel Reading (Mark 1:12-15)**

1. When does Jesus go into the desert?
2. Why does Jesus go there?
3. Is his testing by Satan significant?
4. What might the wild beasts represent?
5. What could “the angels ministered to him” mean?
6. What might be the significance of Jesus spending time in the desert immediately before he begins his public ministry?
7. What has happened to John the Baptist? What tone does this set?
8. Where is Jesus?
9. What is “the gospel of God?”
10. What should people do to be part of God’s kingdom?
11. When is this kingdom coming? How is it coming?
12. What else catches your attention?

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