

Theme of Lent is twofold

1st Sunday of Lent (March 9): (R3) Mark 1:12-15; (R1) Genesis 9:8-15; (R2) 1 Peter 3:18-22.

The Lenten season has a twofold character. It recalls our baptism or prepares others for it; and it stresses penance.

In the first reading, the Flood can signify baptism. We might ask, "Did the ark save Noah or did the Flood?" In the second reading, St. Peter says Noah was saved by the flood waters — "All escaped in the ark through the water." What Peter meant was that the flood waters destroyed sinners. Had they not been destroyed they might have corrupted Noah and his family.

After the Flood, God once again offered peace to a sinful world. The sign of that peace was his rainbow in the clouds. In the long ago, the bow was a weapon of war and so a part of a soldier's equipment. But the rainbow spanning heaven and earth after a storm was also seen as a symbol of peace. Hence, in Greek mythology, the Greek goddess of the rainbow, Iris, was also the messenger of peace between the gods and mankind.

The rainbow was seen as a symbol of peace, for if an arrow were put on the string, it would point heavenwards, not earthwards; it would point toward God, not toward man. For instance, when the Choctaw Indians made a peace treaty, they would hand their bow to their enemies with the arrow pointed toward themselves. When a gunslinger shows he has no hostile aims, he hands his gun to the sheriff with the barrel pointed toward himself. The arrow on a rainbow does not point toward man.

Thus when the rainbow appeared after the Flood, Noah saw it as a pledge of peace between God and mankind.

St. Peter, in the second reading, saw water as saving Noah. "Eight persons," he said, "escaped in the ark through the water." Then he concluded that this saving water prefigured baptism — "You are now saved by a baptismal bath which corresponds to this exactly." Water removes physical dirt; the waters of



Father Albert Shamon

A word for Sunday

baptism remove the sins that dirty the soul.

After the baptism of Jesus, the Holy Spirit came upon him and drove him out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After our baptism, we, too, are tested. Baptism makes us rich with God's life. Satan, envious of our riches, attacks us, as pirates once attacked merchant ships with rich cargoes.

Thus the second theme of Lent is penance. Penance weakens the appeal of the devil. By denying ourselves what is legitimate, it becomes easier to deny ourselves what is illegitimate. Who does more can do less. Who can lift a 100 pounds can certainly lift 50 pounds.

Baptism restores life, but not the perfect balance in life that existed once in Eden. Adam's sin weakened our wills, dimmed the light of reason so that it could fall into error, and made our passions strongly inclined to evil. These wounds of sin are healed by penance.

And what are these penances? One is to be faithful to the duties of one's state in life. Another is to accept the difficulties arising from one's work or from living with others. As one cynic said, "Mankind I love, it is people I can't stand." A third penance can be to bear patiently with the trials of life and the insecurity that pervades our life here. What a powerful truth is expressed in these words: "He knows, he loves, he cares — nothing this truth can dim. He gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him."

A fourth and a great penance is to

practice charity. What is charity? It is *silence* when your words would hurt. It is *patience* when your neighbor is curt. It is *deafness* when a scandal flows. It is *thoughtfulness* for others' woes. It is *promptness* when duty calls. It is *courage* when misfortune falls.

Finally, examine your conscience on these practical things that you should do all Lent. The daily rosary. Mass as often as possible during the week. Confession at least once a month. Reading Scripture — a verse a day, at least. Be kind, loving, thoughtful toward others. Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation. Use it wisely!

Father Shamon is administrator of St. Isaac Jogues Chapel, Fleming.

Daily Readings

Monday, March 10
Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18; Psalms 19:8-10, 15; Matthew 25:31-46

Tuesday, March 11
Isaiah 55:1-10; Psalms 44:1-7, 16-19; Matthew 6:7-15

Wednesday, March 12
Jonah 3:1-10; Psalms 51:3-4, 12-13, 18-19; Luke 11:29-32

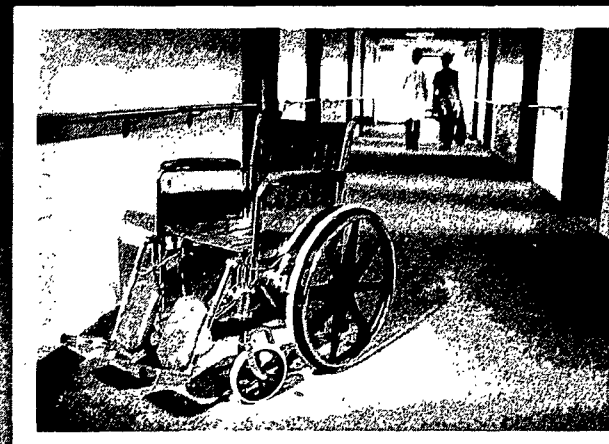
Thursday, March 13
Ephesians 4:12-14, 16, 23-25; Psalms 138:1-3, 7-8; Matthew 7:7-12

Friday, March 14
Ezekiel 18:21-28; Psalms 130:1-3; Matthew 5:20-26

Saturday, March 15
Deuteronomy 26:16-19; Psalms 49:1-2, 4, 5, 7-8; Matthew 5:43-48

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Kids' Chronicle

Answers from page 12

1. gods, 2. name, 3. holy, 4. Honor, 5. kill, 6. steal, 7. witness