

**1<sup>st</sup> Lent** – A wonderful Monday morning in The Valley, staff is limited because of the weather, and I am alone in the office watching the snow and the weather forecast for today and the rest of the week. What is Hell like? There are various ideas, but my thought (since I am one who prefers warm temperatures and sunshine) is – Hell is the opposite of what we enjoy the most. Thus – for me, this past month has truly been testing me.

Speaking of Hell – I don't think any one of us wishes to spend Eternity there. With that in mind, the Church gives us the Penitential Season of Lent every year during which we are given the opportunity to get on the right track and live our lives as God designed us to live them: namely by loving God, and by loving one another (as we would like to be loved and cared for).

The primary purpose of Lent is to prepare us for the celebration of Jesus' death and Resurrection. The Church tries to achieve this goal by leading her children to *metanoia* or true "repentance," by reordering their priorities, and the changing their values, ideals, and ambitions through fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and self-control. Since by Baptism we share the death and Resurrection of Jesus, today's readings refer to Baptism directly or indirectly.

The first reading from Genesis tells us how man irrevocably broke the *original covenant* God had made with Adam and Eve, and how the merciful God selected Noah and his family to renew the covenant. Noah's rescue from the flood symbolizes how we are saved through the water of Baptism which cleanses us of sin and makes us one with Christ. Today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 25) is an exquisite penitential prayer, humbly acknowledging human insufficiency and our radical dependence upon God, His mercy and His forgiveness. The psalmist lists some of God's Own characteristics that will shape the life of the forgiven penitent: truth, compassion, love, kindness, goodness, uprightness, humility, and justice.

In St. Peter's second letter, St Peter shows us how Noah's episode prefigured Baptism. He reminds us that, as Noah and his family were saved from the waters of the deluge, so we are saved through the waters of Baptism. Baptism is an outward sign of the New Covenant that God has made with His people. It makes us adopted children of God, heirs of Heaven, and temples of the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospel, we are told that Jesus faced and defeated the tempter by His forty days of prayer and penance in the desert immediately following His baptism. It also tells us how Jesus started preaching His Messianic mission: "*The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent. Believe in the Gospel.*"

Why was Jesus tempted after His baptism? The author of Hebrews reminds us that the Incarnate Son of God wanted **to experience human life to the full**, except for sin. Since temptation and how we respond to it are integral parts of our lives, Jesus experienced them also. The Fathers of the Church explain that Jesus'

temptations are described after his baptism to teach us why we are tempted and to show us how we should conquer temptations. Baptism and Confirmation give us the weapons we need to do battle with Satan. God never tempts people, and never permits them to be tempted beyond their strength. But He does allow them to be tempted. Why? Here are the five reasons given by the Fathers: i) so that we can learn by experience that [with God] we are indeed stronger than the tempter; ii) to prevent us from becoming conceited over having God's gifts; iii) that the devil may receive proof that we have completely renounced him; iv) that by the struggle we may become even stronger; and v) that we may realize how precious is the grace we have received.

Lent should be a time for personal reflection on where we stand as Christians in accepting the Gospel challenges in thought, word and deed. It is also a time to assess our relationships with our family, friends, working colleagues, and other people with whom we come in contact, especially those of our parish. We should examine whether we are able to make any positive contribution to other people's lives and to eradicate the abuses which are part of our society.

Let us convert Lent into a time for spiritual growth and Christian maturity

Let us use Lent as a time to fight daily against the evil within us and around us: Repenting and fighting against temptations and evil is a lifetime's task. Jesus did not overcome Satan in the wilderness; He achieved that only in His death. Lent reminds us that we have to take up the fight each day against the evil within us and around us, and never give up. Jesus has given the assurance that the Holy Spirit is with us, empowering us, so that final victory will be ours through Jesus Christ.

Let us pray for the Conversion of the World  
& for Peace

#### Feasts this week

#### **C**hair of St Peter – February 22

In ancient Rome, families remembered their dead relatives and friends at a feast during the latter part of February in which an empty chair represented their deceased. Since the early Christians did not know the date of St. Peter's death, they remembered him with a feast around his empty chair on February 22. Later, the Church would see the Chair of St. Peter as a symbol of his authority as the first bishop of both Rome and of Antioch. It was to Peter that Jesus said, "I have prayed for you, Peter, that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned to Me, you must strengthen the faith of your brothers and sisters."