

Readings: *Genesis 9: 8 – 15; Ps. 24(25): 3 – 7; 1 Peter 3: 18 – 22; Mark 1: 12 – 15*

On the first five Sundays of Lent each year the Church gives us in the Old Testament Readings a sort of potted history of the relationship between God and his people. (*We can get a fuller version of this history by reading all fifteen of the passages, spread over the three-year cycle.*)

In each year we hear of a series of events, or prophetic messages, in which God establishes anew the relationship which was broken by the rebellion of Adam and Eve.

Today our potted history begins with the figure of Noah. The book Genesis tells us that, when God had seen the wickedness of the human race, he regretted his act of creation and decided to destroy all living things. But one thing stopped him – *Noah had found favour in the eyes of the LORD*. So he ordered Noah to build an ark and to take his family, along with living creatures of every kind, into it, *for I have seen that you are righteous before me*.

Today's reading begins when the flood has subsided and Noah, with his family and all the living creatures, have come out of the ark to begin life anew, freed from the universal wickedness which had been washed away by the waters of the flood. Noah's first act was to build an altar to the LORD, and offer a sacrifice in thanksgiving. God's first act was to bless Noah and his family.

Then, for the first time in our Old Testament, we find the word 'covenant'. God binds himself to the whole of creation – not just to Noah and his family, but to *everything that lives*. He promises that he will never again curse the earth because of what the human race has done. And he gives a sign which will recall the covenant, so that *the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all things of flesh*. That sign is the rainbow – something which is part of the universe, created by God and now proclaimed to be under his protection – however the human race behaves.

Each of the readings on these five Sundays of Lent can tell us something about our relationship with God. From today's reading we might pick out one or more of the following for thought and prayer: the beginning of our discipleship in the water of Baptism, which like the waters of the flood, destroys evil and saves those chosen by God (*See today's second reading*):

our place in the created universe, for which we, as chosen disciples, have responsibility:

the unbreakable bond or covenant which God has established with us, his chosen people.