

HOMILY FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

God said to Noah, “See, I establish my Covenant with you and with your descendants.”

This is the first, formal agreement God makes with all creation – with every living creature. The final, formal agreement God makes with all creation is through Jesus Christ. All of the other covenants in the Old Testament which occur between the first and the last are made between God and Abraham and his descendants – just with the Hebrew people.

The Talmud – the primary text of Jewish law says that everyone affected by this first covenant - all of us under the sign of the rainbow, are obligated to certain commitments. The Talmud, of which Jesus was an adherent, said that we should establish courts of justice – meaning to order human activity; to refrain from blasphemy, idolatry, sexual perversion, bloodshed, robbery and eating meat cut from living animals. Everyone is obliged to respect order and authority for the good of humanity and to deal with the living things of creation appropriately.

Jesus is the final covenant with all creation established in sacrificial love. Even those who have died previously are promised the hope of new life.

When we think about the colours of our liturgical seasons, they represent the rainbow. The visible colours of a rainbow are bordered by red and violet. Near the middle you will find green. The combination of all colours is white. Even in our four liturgical colours, the Church is called to be a sign of the covenant with all creation.

Peter presents these thoughts in the second reading. He likens the flood to the death of Jesus Christ. As the flood was a great washing away of the evil afflicting the world, Jesus dying for our sins is also a great washing away of the power of evil afflicting our world. Jesus has wiped away the triumph of evil, even though it is still trying to win back control. It can't of course because, whenever we gather to celebrate the Eucharist and when we present again the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ in our present world, the power of God's commitment to save the world destroys the power of evil.

Our formal ritual of the Eucharist is a formal agreement with every creature under heaven. We sometimes say in the preface that we stand with countless hosts of angels, “United with them, and in the name of every creature under heaven.”

Peter says that a formal arrangement has been made when Jesus made a pledge to God from a good conscience – a good conscience because he wasn't tempted by Satan. This good conscience brought resurrection and our entry into heaven. Jesus Christ's dying for our sins, has completely obliterated any power or any act to steal our eternal life away from us.

Even the spirits in prison – the condemned – were preached to in order to prepare them for the day of resurrection. This is why we teach, that Jesus descended into hell. This is a true and complete washing away of the powers of evil.

Yes, there is a formality in our faith. There is a formality in the ordering of the Church. Christianity does not happen accidentally. It is not a whim or a fad. It requires commitment.

When I am presenting to parents preparing to have their children baptised, I remind them that that Church's definition of discipleship is a conscious decision carried out in action. Being Christian is not accidental. It is formal. It is living with a purpose.

When Jesus says, "The time has come. The Kingdom of God is close at hand," do we imagine that God is not working according to some plan?

When Jesus says 'to repent' do we imagine it needs no real effort from us?

We really do need to let go of everything that does not fit into the formal ordering of our companionship with Jesus and with purpose, with his Church and its ordering. Life is not given to us to do with as we think. Jesus has other ideas.

Of course, as seen by the rainbow and the cross, these signs of the first and the last covenants, everything begins with mercy. The mercy we receive from God and the mercy we offer to others.