

1st Sunday of Lent 2021

There is something magical about a rainbow even though we know that we will never pick up the riches supposedly stored at its end! The rainbow often shines through the darkness of a receding storm, assuring us that there is light at the end of a tunnel however dark, as the story of Noah attests. In the Genesis story the rainbow is the sign of God's Covenant, God's special relationship, not only with Noah and his descendants but with the planet and with all living creatures reminding us to care for the whole of creation. And we do this confident of God's continued faithfulness and love. It is precisely because of this promised special relationship that God will never forget us, even if, at times, we forget God. The psalmist puts it beautifully when writing, "The Lord is good and upright, showing the path to those who stray, guiding the humble in the right path, teaching his ways to the poor."

This very positive first reading and psalm are chosen to introduce the Gospel passage, Mark's very brief version of Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. In the Hebrew Scriptures the wilderness is a place of ambiguity, both of revelation and of testing. Jesus has just been baptised, the Spirit has rested on him, he has heard the words from heaven, You are my Son, the beloved, my favour rests on you. And then immediately, the Spirit **drove** Jesus into the wilderness where he remained for 40 days and was tempted by Satan. He was with the wild beasts and the angels looked after him. That's it. Full stop. We maybe want to fill out the account by seeing what Matthew and Luke write about the temptations, but we should stay with Mark reflecting on what he has written. Mark mentions Jesus being with the wild beasts reminding us that Jesus came to reconcile the **whole** of creation to the Father. He mentions that angels looked after him, and we remember that angels are messengers from God bringing strength, healing and good news, today, as in the past.

The second part of the gospel passage records the beginning of Jesus' public ministry with his assurance that the time to 'repent' and 'believe' is **now**. Jesus IS the Good News. Repent means much more than being sorry, it means seeing things in a new light and letting this influence the way we live. We have endured nearly 12 months of COVID. The number of deaths attributed at least in part to COVID has gone way past 100,000 in the UK. People have lost their jobs, children and students have been unable to study and learn together, families and friends unable to meet freely, funerals and weddings have taken place without loved ones being present, the hospitality and retail trades have been severely hit. We have had enough negativity to last a life time, so let's 'repent' this Lent putting a very **positive** slant on prayer fasting and almsgiving, by going out of our way to being kind, generous, compassionate to ourselves and to others, refraining from anything that would harm other people and the planet we inhabit. We could be like the rainbow, being a sign of hope in God's special relationship with us, and we could be angels to one another, assuring each other that we are never alone, rather we face the future together, believing in a God who loves us unconditionally.

Bidding Prayers for the First Sunday of Lent

Celebrant:

The Lord is good and upright, showing the path to those who stray, guiding the humble in the right path, teaching his ways to the poor. With these words of today's psalm in our hearts we turn to God in prayer.

Reader:

For the Church – that on this first Sunday of Lent the Church will support us in our desire to be positive in the way we live and the things we do during these 40 days of grace.

Lord in your mercy

For our political and civic leaders – that they will do all they can to bring about a fairer distribution of the world's resources so that for those for whom fasting is a daily occurrence may receive the food they need.

Lord in your mercy

For those who feel that they have strayed so far from God that there is no way back – that they may know in their hearts that no sin is greater than God's forgiveness.

Lord in your mercy

For those who are suffering in body, mind or spirit, especially those living with dementia – that they and those who care for them will receive the love and support they need.

Lord in your mercy

For those who have died, all victims of violence, accident, natural disaster and the COVID pandemic, for Terence Patrick McMahon, Fr John Wallace MSC, Terry Collins, Elise Shore, James McKune, Patrick Doran, Jack Cockayne, Anne Spikker and Patrick Donovan whose anniversaries occur this week – that they and all who have died may rest in peace and rise in glory.

Lord in your mercy

Either aloud or in silence we pray for our own special intentions...pause...then

Lord in your mercy

We ask the prayers of Mary as we say, Hail Mary...

Celebrant:

Give us the grace, Lord, to continue to have a positive attitude of kindness, generosity and compassion, so that we and others may experience your unconditional love as we journey through Lent. Through Christ our Lord. Amen