

# Homily for First Lenten Sunday

February 15, 2018

The Church instituted Lent in the 4th century to give us a time to repent for our sins which have led Jesus to the cross. In a world full of sin but which refuses to recognize it as sin, it is good for us to have this time.

**The Readings** are spare. The first one tells us that although God cleansed the world of sin, he did so in order to make a covenant with humankind and the earth. The rainbow now serves as a reminder that there is sun even in rain; that God's provident love for us is greater than all evil. The first letter of Peter sees Noah's Ark as a symbol of the baptism by which we all have been cleansed of Adam's sin and our own personal sins. And the gospel reminds us that when even the Son of God becomes human, he is subject to the temptations that assail all of us.

Together they remind us of the reality of the sin for which Jesus as the Just One must suffer for all our injustice, but, in the end, his risen love will transform us all.

## The Meaning for us:

We are used to using Lent to do some penance for our personal sins. Perhaps this year it is also a good time to be aware of our collective sins as Americans and as American Roman Catholics, so we might do penance for sins of which we are dimly aware. Lent then could be a time to ask for conversion from what leads us to our collective sins.

*As Americans*, we have much to repent for: Our country suffers regular slaughter of its school children because we will not legislate reasonable arms control; is the largest exporter of lethal arms to the rest of the world; is the only nation which has not signed the treaty to reduce the carbon emissions which are killing our planet's wild life and us; is the only one of the western nations which allows abortions in the third trimester; ranks 37<sup>th</sup> among nations for the quality of our health care for our citizens  
You can add your own complaints to this list of our country's many and manifest sins.

*As American Catholics* we are a church which has not dealt honestly or compassionately with sexual abuse, clerical and otherwise; will not see the linkage between the sin of abortion and other issues affecting human life; has inflicted on us an unintelligible English translation of our liturgy; Does not provide enough vocations for the priesthood and religious life, and has a hierarchy which will not recognize and deal with this issue;  
And you can add your own complaints to this list of our Church's sins.

These larger social sins are my sins, because I am the country and I am the Church. It is because we do not storm our congress demanding change, do not talk to our local state representative, do not demand a commitment from our political party, do not communicate with our pastor and our bishop, that we continue to live with these sins.

Therefore this Lent, beside our fasting, abstinence & Mite Box, I recommend three things:

- 1) Read the Pope's inspired encyclical, *Laudato Si'*;
- 2) Write to our congressman or to our bishop about our chief concern;
- 3) Pray for the opening of our eyes to larger social ills than what we ordinarily consider, and in that prayer ask for the conversion of our minds and hearts. Only God can change our world, but God has to do it through us. **Be the good news** for our country, our world, and our Church.