

1st Sunday Lent (B)

18th February 2018

'Fast — to Pray and to Give'

Gen 9: the Covenant with Noah — rainbow

1Pt 3: *that water is a type of the baptism which saves you now*

Mk 1: 12–15: Jesus's forty days in the wilderness

In Year B — this liturgical year when we hear the Gospel of Mark — we get the very concise version of Our Lord's 40-day fast in the wilderness, and St Mark does not go in to the details of the temptations like the other Gospels do. He presents us with the bare facts that, in response to the outpouring of the Spirit, and in preparation for all that He will give to mankind in His public ministry, Our Lord takes these long days of fasting and prayer, in solitude, in the isolated, harsh landscape, of the Judaeian wilderness.

In imitation of Our Lord's great fast, the Church gives us, each year, these 40 days of fasting and prayer in Lent. This is not a time of hiding ourselves away, however, or of simply trying to do better by our own efforts since when we enter the 'desert' of Lent we know that Our Lord is already there. In Lent, He is calling us to fewer distractions through fasting; to greater union with Him in prayer; and to greater concern for others through our almsgiving. Let's at least recall every day this Lent that it *is* Lent! Let's not let days pass by in this season when we forget totally that it even is Lent! The purple sheet that

accompanies the Newsletter this week gives you some ideas for ways in which you can enter more fully into Lent. Please take it home and read it; don't leave it here in church or put it back into the tray! It's a most precious time of year, so let's not waste it — let's be committed to keeping Lent well, and to being with the Lord in this sacred fast.

I would like you to see how the elements of fasting, prayer and almsgiving are interconnected. I don't think that we should merely say, "Well, I'm giving up such-and-such," as if that were enough for Lent. Fasting provides the fuel, so to speak — the impetus — for a greater giving to the Lord, and a greater giving to others ... So we should each be looking to grow in every one of the dimensions of Lent, not just in one dimension! Our Lent fast day this Friday, to benefit the poor communities which CaFOD works with, is a model of this: We deliberately go without, for one meal, to take a chance to pray and be in solidarity with those communities, and to give what we save to assisting them in their dire needs. I want to pause right there ... since after Holy Communion today we will hear from one of our parishioners as to how this element of our fasting will be used ... Let's make this fast a key focus of this 1st week of Lent: we'll give up, to give Him and His people more.