

## **First Sunday of Lent B/2009**

I would like to start this homily by talking to you about the USA national basketball team. The USA national basketball team is called the Dream Team. At the Olympic Games in Athens in 2004, in spite of all the stars they had, the Americans performed so poorly that each one of the players felt that they had betrayed the confidence the American people placed in them to represent the country.

After this failure, the players pledged to make amends for the next games. For that reason, they changed their name and became the "Redeeming Team". Full of determination, the redeeming team went to the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 with just one desire: winning and winning. Indeed, the American basketball team performed so well that they beat all the teams they met and became the World champions to the satisfaction of many.

Why do I tell you this story? Well, because of the attitude of these players who did not lock up themselves in their failure. Rather, as determined as they were, they made amends and played better than they previously did. In fact, when someone has failed in his commitments or has underperformed his duty, there is always a second chance; there is always a possibility of a new beginning and another opportunity to take.

Lent is a time of a second chance; an opportunity God gives us to start again from where we have failed and stumbled. It is a time of standing up from the dust of our misery, from where we fell down. A time of trusting God's mercy and bounty toward us, in order to hope for a bright future. A time of understanding that failure is part of the human journey, but the journey is not over; it is still before us. Therefore, we have to stand up and keep going, counting on God's grace we receive in the sacrament of confession.

With Lent, the Church reminds that life is a fight, but in this fight, we are not alone. Jesus is with us; he fights with us, at our side; he supports us and wants us to live. We might have been wounded in the fight of life or have failed in our commitments, but even so God wants us to survive from the burden of our failures and to live. That is the point of today's readings of the first Sunday of Lent.

The first reading reminds us of the story of Noah and the rescue of the species of the earth through the flood. The text describes in particular the covenant God made with Noah after the big flood that devastated the earth. It reminds us that God wants the life of all the things he has created. That is why he pledged never to destroy the living beings and everything that dwells on earth anymore. He put the rainbow in the sky as his sign that reminds us of his will to preserve the universe and to keep life ongoing in spite of human sin.

This pledge of God will be fulfilled, once and for all, in Jesus Christ. God's promise of life made to Noah will become complete in Jesus Christ. That is why St Peter, in the second reading, links baptism in Jesus Christ to the ark of Noah.

In fact, at the time of the flood, while everything was destroyed, only eight people, that is, Noah and his family, were brought to safety in the ark.

For Peter, as it was with the ark, baptism is the bringing to safety in water of those who believe in Jesus. Baptism is not merely a physical cleansing; it is a spiritual cleansing of the whole individual, body, heart and mind. Its cleansing affects the whole individual. By accepting to be baptized in Jesus Christ, the Christian pledges to God with a clear conscience to follow Jesus. In other words, the water of baptism does not save us, unless it is accompanied by the pledge to God that proceeds from a good conscience to do the will of God.

What makes baptism effective is the resurrection of Jesus. Therefore, it is the grace of the Risen Lord which cleanses us. It is to the Risen Lord that we pledge ourselves. It is to him that we look for strength to keep the pledge we have given to be his disciples.

That same Risen Lord cries us to us at the beginning of this Lenten season: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel". Jesus knows the difficulties of human life and the temptations we are confronted with. He was tempted in the desert; but he triumphed from the evil one. If we listen to him and follow him, we can also triumph.

That is why Jesus insists on repentance and believing in the Gospel he brings. Repentance means a radical change of a way of living, thinking and being. It has something to do with abandoning the sins and living by God's commandments. Most of the time, we have confusion between sorrow for the consequences of sins and sorrow for sins. In fact, many people are sorry for the consequence their sin will bring rather than for the sin itself. If, for instance, they were sure they could escape the consequence, they would certainly do the same thing again. But what Jesus wants is a real hatred of sin and a sincere love of God's commands.

In the same way, when Jesus invites us to believe in the Good News he brings, he wants us to trust his word, to believe that God is really such as he tells us, that his love is so great that he is able to forgive us and give us a new chance of life. That is what Lent is all about, that is, to come back to the Lord our God through fasting, praying and almsgiving. Let us not miss the opportunity God gives us to build anew our lives, to give them a new orientation like the "Redeeming Team". God bless you all and lead you to a holy Lent where you strive to bring peace in your families, in your relationship with God, with yourself and with people around you.

**Genesis 9, 8-15; 1 Peter 3, 18-22; Mark 1, 12-15**



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