

1st Sunday Lent B 2-15

Lent is here already, although these first days have been somewhat overtaken by winter weather: our first Lenten penance might be shoveling the driveway—yet again.

But many of us will also abstain from some personal favorite foods or drinks: no chocolate or sweets or soda—that helps our self-control and hopefully makes us hungry for Jesus. And that’s good!

And some of us may attempt the harder fasting: for example, abstaining from road rage, from harsh & brutal judgment of others; letting go of bitterness or unforgiveness, fasting from gossip on Facebook. Because those things are wrong, they are sinful. We might bring them to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Stopping them is good too, of course.

Today I am thinking of a different kind of Lenten observance. I see it in today’s first reading from Genesis. After the great flood, we hear God speaking to Noah, “I am now establishing my covenant with you, Noah, and your descendants...” *and with who else? Anybody?*

*“I am making a **covenant** with you Noah, and your descendants, **and with every living creature that was with you: the birds, the various wild and tame animals that were with you in the ark...***”

Imagine that! God made a covenant with all the birds, all the animals, and all living beings never again to destroy them by flood! (I think of the Father feeding the birds of the air.) What covenant have we humans made with God’s creatures, or with the earth that gives all of us life? Is the earth and everything on it slowly being destroyed?

We are told that an aluminum can in a landfill, will last 80-200 years. A plastic soda bottle will remain in the earth for 400 years. A disposable diaper, 550 years. A glass bottle in a Rumpke landfill will still be there tens of thousands, perhaps millions of years. Styrofoam will not decompose—ever. God made a covenant never again to destroy living creatures.

The question is not political, it is spiritual: are we caring for this beautiful planet that God created and loaned to us?

Pope Francis says we are not. January 14, 2014: "I wish to mention another threat to peace, which arises from the greedy exploitation of environmental resources. Even if 'nature is at our disposition,' all too often we do not 'respect it or consider it a gracious gift which we must care for and set at the service of our brothers and sisters, including future generations."

May 21, 2014: "Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude."

Lent is a wonderful season to control our appetites, and try to deal with our sinful and hurtful behaviors. But what if this Lent, we remember God's covenant with all living creatures? What if when the weather clears, we look out at the woods, up at the heavens, over at the animals, into the waters and say, "Thank you God for this amazing creation! Forgive me for the harm that I may be causing to your work! I promise to do what I can to honor the covenant you made so long ago!"