

Homily – First Sunday of Lent San Fernando Cathedral – February 18, 2024

In the Book of Genesis creation is described as God's making order out of chaos. Floods, hurricanes, earthquakes wreak havoc and spread chaos. Hatred, violence – as all sin – emerge from a disordered human nature and cause alienation and divisions. In today's first reading, after the Great Flood when chaos filled the world, God makes a covenant with all of creation. He will not allow the waters of chaos to overcome his creation again. It is as though he sets his archery bow down facing away from the world in a rainbow, reminding us of his love for us and his power to set things right, to overcome chaos, to bring about order and justice.

In today's gospel, Jesus is driven into the wilderness by the Spirit to be tested by Satan. The desert is a desolate place of chaos – inhabited by demons, wild animals. When the Israelites of old were rescued from slavery in Egypt through the Exodus, they wandered in the wilderness for forty years, learning to trust God's care for them in an inhospitable environment. In wandering through the desert they learned to be God's people, utterly dependent upon God for everything. They learned that everything is in God's good hands.

Today's gospel reminds us that being children of God involves struggle, testing. Jesus passes the test in the desert and begins his mission of proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. He urges his listeners to repent, to change their lives, including their thoughts, attitudes, and actions, to live in the kingdom: a place of justice, peace, mercy, fidelity, harmony, and unity. We are constantly challenged to move beyond our weakness and self-centeredness to learn to rely on God's power and strength. This

enables us to move away from the path of sin and to walk in God's ways – in accord with the word of God.

Jesus defeated all temptations, and obtained absolute and definitive victory against evil, sin and death. He invites us to participate in his victory. It is he who claims his victory in us if we allow Him. Pope Francis recently reminded us that Jesus “never abandons us in temptation.” As missionary disciples of the Lord Jesus, we are challenged to follow him even to the Cross on Calvary in order to carry out our shared responsibility for establishing the kingdom of God more fully in our world. The Holy Spirit will guide and strengthen us to be faithful to our calling.

So, my dear brothers and sisters, what do you sense is the thing you must do to enable yourself to be open to God's love so that you may be His love for others? Where in your life do you need to be “enlarged” or “stretched” for love? That is the personal penance of consequence!

With Christ as your companion, may you discover, new hope, new perspectives, and new possibilities in the desert of your heart. May our Mother of Guadalupe show us the way to her Son.