



Archdiocese of San Antonio

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Homily – Catholic Men’s Conference

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In the very first chapter of the Bible God creates order over chaos. God separates light from darkness, the waters above from the waters below, the dry land from the sea. God creates male and female in his own “image and likeness” and sees that his creation is **very good**.

Given our experience, isn’t that hard to believe? We know that there is **evil** in our world, that evil forces are at work, that within and among us the potential of evil lurks beneath the surface. That is why we do not stop reading the Bible at the very first chapter but continue through a series of stories about individuals who fall into sin – eating the forbidden fruit, killing a brother, engaging in wanton violence. In Genesis 6 we are told that God “regretted that he had made man on the earth” and nearly exterminated all people in the flood – except for Noah and his family. There is an element of salvation in this story, a new beginning, a new creation. God makes a covenant with Noah, promising never again to destroy the earth with flood

waters. God puts down his bow and arrows, and the bow is seen by the human family as a beautiful rainbow, a sign of hope.

Besides Jesus, there are four figures in today's gospel: the Holy Spirit, Satan, the wild beasts, and angels. Satan and the wild beasts are at home in the dangerous wilderness, a dwelling place for the forces of evil. Jesus does not go into the wilderness alone: the Spirit leads him and angels minister to him. These, of course, are forces of good. Jesus stays in the wilderness for forty days where he is tempted by Satan and tested by his heavenly Father. He not only survives his experience in the desert but emerges to begin his public ministry, announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God and calling sinners – that is, everyone -- to repent and to believe in the good news of God's salvation, the gospel. While the forces of evil have not yet been overcome, they have lost the battle in the wilderness and Jesus has passed the crucial test. The cosmic struggle between good and evil continues, but we know the eventual outcome and that gives us hope and courage to persevere in the Christian life.

The forty days remind us of the forty days Moses spent on Mount Sinai before having a powerful encounter with God with thunder and lightning – or the forty days that the prophet Elijah fasted in the wilderness before being led to the same mountain for an intimate encounter with God

in a gentle breeze. The number forty also reminds us of the forty years that the people of God wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt and before entering the Promised Land. There they tested God on many occasions, while, in fact, God was testing them – teaching them that they are utterly dependent on him and must learn to walk in his ways, keeping his commandments.

During these forty days of Lent we will walk with Jesus on his way to Calvary. This is a difficult path to follow, but we must do it if we are to be faithful disciples of the Lord. The First Letter of Peter reminds us that the underlying purpose of Jesus' death on the Cross was to lead us to God. The paschal mystery produces new life, a new creation; we are called to be alive in the Spirit.

But as we walk with Jesus toward Jerusalem, we are to keep in mind the reality of our lives and our world – that the forces of evil, which were definitively overcome by Jesus' death and resurrection, are still at work among and within us until the Lord's Second Coming. The waters of chaos, symbolized in the flood, have been transformed by God into the waters of baptism which cleanses us, refreshes us, and makes us a new creation. As we walk through Lent and become aware of our weakness, our sins, we are preparing to renew our baptismal promises at Easter.

The gospel tells us something important about God, about Jesus, and about ourselves. About God: despite God's enduring and infinite love for us, he does not protect us from temptation. About Jesus: he is God's beloved Son but that does not shield him from struggling with the forces of evil. He knows our struggles because he became like us in all things but sin. About ourselves: we may expect to be led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit where we will join the cosmic battle between God and Satan.

Lent is a sacred time of the year. We need not approach it with what Pope Francis calls "funeral faces." We are believers. We believe the Gospel. We believe in God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are also sinners called to a change of heart, a change of attitude, a change of our ways to become authentic disciples of the risen Lord.

May Our Lady, the Mother of the Church, bring us closer to her beloved Son and deeper into the mystery of God at work in our lives!