

## Homily for the 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent

A sick man turned to his doctor as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I'm afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side." Very quietly, the doctor said, "I don't know." "You don't know?", the patient retorted. "You're a Christian man, and don't know what's on the other side?" The doctor was still holding the doorknob of that examination room door, when all of the sudden from the other side came a sound of scratching and whining. And as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room, and leapt on the doctor with all the joy in the world, giving him lots of kisses. And then it occurred to him. Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. And he didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here. And when the door opened, he sprang in without any fear. And so, yes, I know little of what's on the other side of death, but I do know one thing: I know my Master is there, and that's enough for me."

My friends, much of life, both our spiritual lives and our regular everyday lives, depend upon our point of view. It's easy to see in the story about the doctor and the patient. Both men were looking at the same issue – they were struggling with the question of death, and what eternal life with God was really going to be like. For the patient confronting his illness, his point of view was one of uncertainty, maybe even doubt. While for the doctor treating the sick man, even though he didn't know for sure, his point of view became one of trust and hope – all thanks to his little dog. Speaking of which, what was that doggie doing in his office in the first place? But anyway, the point is each man's point of view – his attitude – shaped his entire way of dealing with that same issue. And our Scriptures today touch on this very point.

For example, in our first reading we hear the familiar story of Noah's Arc. Now, we remember how Noah's neighbors harassed and made fun of him for building such a huge boat – not even near any water. If you saw the movie *Evan Almighty*, then you probably have a pretty good idea of this whole part of the story. But, when God's promise to Noah was fulfilled and the rain started pouring out of the sky, you can bet that to the majority of mankind water looked like a very bad thing. And yet, according to God's plan, that rainwater was for the good of restoring justice to the earth, which had become so corrupt and depraved. And so Noah and his family safely passed through that flood so that humanity could begin anew to live as God's faithful children. Point of view matters.

And what about in our Gospel today from St. Mark? Again, we hear of what happened to Our Lord Jesus immediately after He was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist: Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit out into the desert for 40 days in order to be tempted by Satan. Now, to us trying to get a mental image of this event, it doesn't look very good. Why would the Spirit drive Jesus, in whom the Father was well pleased, to such a horrible place where He would be tempted and possibly led astray? That might be our point of view. But according to God's plan, Jesus did this for our own good. God allowed this to happen so that we might have a Savior who understands and knows what temptation is like. And not only that, He allowed it so that we could see how to resist the devil and overcome temptation too. Point of view matters.

And it just doesn't matter for the people of the Bible, it matters for us too, especially as we begin our Lenten journey. Take the practice of abstaining from meat on Fridays, or fasting in general. To some people they see withholding food from themselves as unwise or unhealthy, especially during this wicked flu season. To others, they see all those Long John Silver's commercials that just happen to appear this time of year as a money-making ploy to trap Catholics during Lent. But what is our attitude toward fasting, or toward the whole of Lent for that matter? Is it just about following some old-fashioned rules, or is it about helping us to see that our physical hunger is meant to make us pay more attention to our spiritual hunger for God? Point of view matters.

But my friends, what shapes our point of view is not wishful thinking or naïveté. Rather it's holding fast to the promises God has made with us. Through Noah, He made a covenant with mankind never to allow water to destroy the whole of the earth again. And through His Son, He made a covenant with us, that we, who repent and believe in the Gospel, will have eternal life in Him. We come to Mass, week after week, to recall, to remember, even to make present in our midst, the covenant that God has made with us, His children. And so, as we prepare to receive the Eucharist, the living presence of God's covenant in Christ with us, we ask God to change our attitude – that He would alter our selfish or cynical ways of thinking, and help us to live more according to His point of view. It matters. God bless you.