First Sunday in Lent 2 (1 Pet 3:18-22)

**REPENT, AND BELIEVE**

St Peter, in his first letter (3:18‑22), isn't concerned with what happened in Noah's time. He is concerned with what happened at our baptism and what that means for the present.

There is an external similarity between the Flood and baptism: God saved his people through water. But there is something more important. In Noah's day, the people who were saved subjected themselves unreservedly to God in obedience to his will.

That is what we did at baptism. At least, that’s what our parents and godparents did for us, in the hope that later on we would ratify the commitment. Presuming that we did, we entered into an agreement with God. We promised to recognize God’s will in our lives, and to surrender ourselves to God in all circumstances, no matter what happens. Now we are faced with the task of renewing our promise in the face of challenges thrown at our obedience.

In St Peter's time, Christians could easily face a death sentence from a corrupt judge. Their baptismal promise to submit to the will of God could challenge them to lay down their life as an offering even to save the judge who condemned them.

Nowadays, most of the challenges to our baptismal promises are less obvious. Often, it is hard to distinguish our ill-will from temptation. In our secret heart, we may resent something that happened to us, or some person, and want nothing more to do with them. Of course, this conflicts with our conscience, and can have adverse physical and mental effects as well. Still, we can present a fairly normal face to the world and even to God in our prayer‑life. How much of it is temptation? How much has my will surrendered to it?

When we pray with complete honesty, it may be like this: “My God, I wish this experience had never happened to me. If you love me, why did you let it happen? I wish I were not afflicted in this particular way. Why did you allow all that damage to be done to me?” Or our prayer could be, “ I wish I had never married this woman, or man. I prayed for guidance, I made an honest effort to prepare for marriage. Why did you do this to me?”

There's nothing wrong with prayer like that, when it is wrung from a heart, even a broken heart, which can still add, “Let your will be done, not mine.” “Bring me through this without hatred or resentment. I dislike intensely my situation or this person, but don't let hatred or resentment destroy my spirit, or even get a foothold on my will.”

In spite of all our praying, our behaviour may betray our true state of spirit. The challenge has proved too much for our resources. We resent what has happened. We reject the person concerned. We are disaffected with our life, we are not at ease, our faith and hope and love are all damaged.

Lent is the best time to recognize God's will for us personally and to surrender to God and his disposition of our life. In accepting our baptism, we made ourselves responsible to the will of God as it is revealed through the circumstances of our life.

“Repent and believe” means, turn against your self‑will and believe that God has your best interests in hand in the very situation that you are rejecting. The temptations that cross you remind you of the personal decision you made when you accepted your baptism.

If we can't bring ourselves today to renew our baptismal vows and submit to God's will in our life, then let us give ourselves six weeks of solid prayer and fasting before the Easter Vigil, and storm heaven to help us, and renew our baptismal promise at the Easter Vigil. Let us give Jesus Christ full freedom to overcome evil in our life and to break the power of temptation.

May the Lord give us his love, joy, and peace.