

Homily – Vietnamese Martyrs Parish

February 18, 2018

In the Book of Genesis creation is described as God's making order out of chaos. Floods, hurricanes, tornadoes wreak havoc and spread chaos. Sin – hatred, violence, racism – 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.

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 – their thoughts, attitudes, and actions – to live in the kingdom: a place of justice and peace, mercy and compassion, unity and harmony, love and fidelity.

Today's gospel reminds us that being children of God involves struggle, testing. 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.

We live in a time of chaos, widespread violence and hatred, serious divisions and growing polarization. As Christians – 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. At our celebration of Tet today, let us leave behind! the sorrows of the past year and resolve to live fully as Christians this new year! Let us re-commit ourselves as Catholics to building up the kingdom of God in our midst – a place of justice and peace!