

# 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent B – 2009 (Sacred Heart)

## We Live in the "Time of Fulfillment"

Jesus' first words in the Gospel of Mark are mysterious: "This is the **time of fulfillment.**" And, with the exception of today, they will be the first words we sing at each Sunday Mass during Lent: "This is the time of fulfillment."

What does Jesus mean?

With these few words, Jesus is **summing up the entire history of humanity**, the central point of which is his own passion, death, and resurrection, as St Peter reminds us in the Second Reading.

With these words, Jesus Christ ushers in the **third and final age** of human history – a history that began in a garden called "Eden."

- ? First there was the **age of creation**, when we lived in the Garden in an **unbroken** communion with God.
- ? But this ended with **original sin**.
- ? This sin, this mis-trust in God's promises, ends up driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and into the **desert** of fallen human nature.
- ? This began the **second age**, the **age of the promise**.
- ? God promised Adam and Eve that he would **send a savior**, a holy king, to free the human family from **domination by the devil** that their sin had caused.
- ? In this second age, God gradually **prepared** the world, through the education of his chosen people Israel, for the **arrival** of that savior and king, Jesus Christ.
- ? When Christ finally arrived, then began the "**time of fulfillment**," the fulfillment of **God's promise** to send that savior.
- ? In this **third and final** period of human history, God actually **enters into** time and space in order to **rescue** us from sin and destruction.
- ? He does this through his **incarnation**, which is extended through all time and space through the life of his **Church**.
- ? The end of this third age will be the new heavens and the new earth.

Lent is a time to focus on **essentials**, and nothing is **more** essential, in a world obsessed with stock markets, political polls, and movie stars, than remembering where we **came from** and where **we're going**.

## Message in a Wound

During Lent, it is a good idea to **pay a little more attention** than usual to the great sacrifice which Christ made for us – the Sacrifice of the cross. One way we can do that is by focusing in

a very special way on the “Stations of the Cross.” Here, in these 14 “stations,” we recall Jesus journey from the home of Pilate (who condemns Him to death) all the way to the grave. These stations call to mind for us, **so many** things: acceptance of trial, compassion for others, rising from our failings, stripping ourselves of all earthly things, entrusting ourselves entirely to the Father... All the lessons we need for our lives of faith are somehow present in these 14 stations. [And this is why, this Lent, our parish has chosen to focus on the stations – and why these stations (from Burnham) are here in the sanctuary – and why, on Ash Wednesday, you received a small cross with the stations on it to hang on your keychains. (If you didn’t get one then – there are a few more in the entryway for you to take as a reminder).]

You see, the Stations of the cross – and the 12<sup>th</sup> station in particular – the death of the Lord – are a **summary** of the story of sin and salvation.

Christ's falls on the way, His wounds and death are all **vivid images of sin**, of what sin does to us, the world, and our relationship with God.

But they are also vivid images of the **intensity of his love for us**: he suffered freely and willingly, to pay the price of our **sins** and give us hope for **salvation**.

A story from our own **American Revolutionary War** helps illustrate this.

- ? An **important military message** had to be sent through territory infested with the enemy - email wasn't available.
- ? A **courageous corporal** was chosen to accompany the **messenger**.
- ? They had not gone far when they **drew fire** from the enemy.
- ? The messenger was **killed** and the corporal **severely wounded** in the side, but he didn't abandon his mission.
- ? He **grabbed the tightly wrapped dispatch** from the dead messenger and rode on till he grew faint from loss of blood.
- ? Fearing the message would fall into the hands of the enemy, he **squeezed** the dispatch into the wound in his side until it **closed around it**.
- ? The next day, they found him with a smile on his lips, so **weak** he could not speak, but still able to **point to the wound** in his side.
- ? There they found the **message**.
- ? The surgeon who cared for him said that the **wound itself** was not fatal, but putting the paper into it **caused his death**.

The **wounds of Christ contain a message for us**, a message of love and sacrifice, a message of salvation from sin, a message of his **unconditional** and **unfailing** devotion to each one of us.

## **Repenting and Believing**

"This is the time of fulfillment."

Through this history lesson, Jesus is reminding us of **where we came** from and, more importantly, **where we're going**: to eternal life with him in heaven.

And his next sentence tells us **how to get there**: "**Repent and believe** in the gospel."

These two things should **characterize** our spiritual lives during Lent.

First, repent; **turn away from self-centered and selfish habits**; break them!

- ? Jesus eagerly **invites us** to repent, and he also gives us the **perfect way** to do it: the **sacrament of confession**.
- ? During Lent, we'll be offering MORE opportunities for confession – not only the regular Saturday time, but between Masses on Sunday morning (together with the CCD kids) **and** Wednesday evenings (after the 7pm Mass). And we'll of course have our Lenten Penance service the last Sunday of March.
- ? Jesus gave the Church the gift of confession because **he knew we would need it**.
- ? The same devil that tempted Jesus in the desert to trust Himself, rather than God, is **still in business** and is **hard at work**, tempting us in the desert of our **consumerist, hedonistic** and **relativistic** culture.
- ? Repentance and confession give God a chance to pour his **unconditional mercy** into our **thirsty souls**.

Our second Lenten exercise is to "**believe in the gospel**."

- ? Believing in the gospel means **trusting Jesus enough to do his will**; it means saying with our decisions, not just our words: "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done."
- ? We find his will in the Ten Commandments, the beatitudes, the teachings of his Church, and the dictates of our conscience.
- ? Greed, lust, laziness, impatience, dishonesty - these are **anti-gospel** values.
- ? Believing in the gospel means **leaving them aside** in favor of generosity, faithfulness, responsibility, sincerity, and patient kindness.
- ? This is **Christ's vision** for our lives, one that he will **help us live out**, if we give him the chance.

In this Mass He is coming among us to **fill our hearts** with the very strength that filled **His** heart, the strength which gave **Him** the **definitive victory** over temptation, sin, and evil.

As we continue with this Mass, then, let's **thank Him** for allowing us to live in the time of fulfillment, and let's ask him to **help us** repent and believe in the gospel.