The Way: A Lenten Reflection by Archpriest Raymond M. Browne

During the Third Week of Great Lent, we hear the story of Noah and the Flood. While there is much meaning contained in this story, hence its place in the Scriptures, at its simplest it is the story of God saving those who are faithful to Him, no matter how insane, depraved, or unmoored from God the world has become.

This is key for all Christians, especially those living in the world, where daily we encounter the enduring rebellion of the world in its manifold forms. Living in such a disordered, rootless, passion-filled world is a minefield of temptations for all of us. In our current environment all the passionate temptations present from the beginning converge on two, not unrelated, creating an endless, if not spiraling, cycle of rage and fear, fear and rage.

Succumbing to either or both of these passions is so easy to do, thereby opening us to other passions pursued to distract us from harsh realities, offering the false consolation of forgetfulness or the momentary soothing of sensual satisfaction. And try as we might, we are poisoned along with everyone else if we seek to navigate these storms on our own. We cannot.

An early Christian writer made the perceptive comment that a solitary Christian is no Christian. For to be a Christian is to belong to the Body of Christ, a living member, an active member of the Body as directed by the Head, Who is Christ Himself. It is only by living in and with the Church that we can behold the sea of life storming with temptations and not despair, knowing there is a calm haven into which we can, if we are smart, flee for protection.

For the Church is not only the Body of Christ, She is the Ark of Salvation. And in the Ark we find salvation from the Flood of sin as it relentlessly accumulates, consuming all around us with darkness and the sting and stench of death, physical and spiritual. We have been saved and can be saved by the Ark into which all of us have been called, like the clean and unclean creatures spoken of in the story. And we are invited not as solitaries, but as pairs, as families.

Our baptism is that invitation, the Gospel, the directions on how and where to go so as to dwell in the Ark. We have accepted the invitation but have not followed the directions, to a greater or lesser degree. But let us observe that Noah and his family were saved because he was righteous, despite living in a world where everyone else had either forgotten God or was at war with Him by the way they lived their lives. He remained faithful because what is true is true, no matter how many people agree or disagree. Like the Righteous Job, Noah knew His Redeemer lives.

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If this Lenten time has been filled with temptations of fear and rage due to the events in the world, do what Lent is given to us for: repent. Stop trying to set the world aright and start setting yourself aright. Having accepted the invitation, read and follow the directions and find your way into the safety of the Ark, where there is a place prepared for you, for me, for everyone. Rather than discerning the motivations of people far away from you in so many ways, discern for the first or forty first time what God is calling you to do, why He created you. How do we do that? As in all things, the Lord shows us: Not my will, but Thy Will be done. Pray, fast, give alms.

Pray Psalms 1, 2, 21, and 50. Fast from social media, gossip, and inflammatory words. Be merciful to others by not judging or condemning them in private conversations and or public forums. And out of the more peaceful heart, focused mind, and generous actions seek the salvation only found in the Ark. The Noah story reminds us it has all happened before. But in the midst of every age and its conflict and destruction there is hope, there is salvation to be found. We have already been given it. Past time to make it our own. Now is the time!