

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
First Sunday of Lent • Year B • February 18, 2024



*God of all goodness,
we beg you to give us
your own Good News.
Place these glad tidings
in our mouth as
nourishment and strength
for the covenant journey
of faith. Amen.*

Sunday Word

Genesis 9:8-15
Psalm 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9
1 Peter 3:18-22
Mark 1:12-15

God's Promise

Noah hears from God a welcome promise: never again shall the earth be destroyed by another great flood. God sets the rainbow in the skies to remind us of his benevolent care.

God's Power

Peter teaches us that Baptism in Christ was prefigured in the flood waters during the time of Noah. By God's power, he washes away our sins and clears our consciences with his grace.

God's Good News

The flood in Noah's day occurred over forty days of rain. Jesus experiences the dryness of the desert for forty days, remaining faithful to his heavenly Father. After this trial, Christ begins his public ministry, proclaiming the Kingdom of God.

Church Teaching: The Covenant

Covenantal Relationship

The understanding of our relationship with God is grounded in the biblical concept of covenant. A covenant (based on the Hebrew word *berit*) is a sacred bond between us and God. God initiates this covenantal relationship through promises and guarantees. God promises to be our God if we promise to be faithful to him.

God maintains the Covenant throughout Salvation History. The original relationship made with Adam and Eve is renewed by God with Noah after the flood. Then for the first time in recorded history, God establishes the Covenant with Abraham and promises that Abraham and his descendants will be the Chosen People and as numerous as the stars in the sky. Later God further solidifies the Covenant on Mount Sinai when Moses receives the Ten Commandments. Finally the Covenant between God and

humanity is fulfilled in Jesus, the Son of God, who is the Messiah and Savior of the world.

Characteristics of the Covenant

God initiates. The Covenant between God and his people is the result of divine initiative. This unique relationship expressed in the Covenant is not between equals. God is superior to us; he is our Creator, and we are created in his image and likeness. God reaches out to us with love, caring for us as his children.

God establishes. The Covenant is not subject to human qualifications. God alone sets the terms, because human sinfulness cannot compromise his love. The perfect love of God invites people into a profound relationship, saving us no matter how often we turn away from God. God will always be there for us. He is the one true God whose love is overflowing.

We respond with love. Our proper response to his perfect love is to imitate his love. We accomplish this through obedience to God's will. The Latin word for obedience, *oboedire*, means "to hear" or "to listen." To love like God is to listen to his Word and surrender in faith.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

For Christians, these three characteristics also describe our baptismal promises. Through Baptism we enter into a committed relationship with the Lord—a relationship totally owing to God's initiative of grace.

Baptism imparts a permanent spiritual mark, the seal of the Lord, on our souls, which can never be taken away. God's commitment to us is not deterred by our sinfulness. Through Baptism we gain entrance into the Church, called to live lives worthy of the Gospel (see Philippians 1:27). Baptism is the gateway to all other sacraments. We are joined to Christ and his Church, bringing us into communion with God.

Through the Paschal Mystery, God establishes the way in which we enter into the fulfillment of the Covenant. We are to imitate the life of Christ in our own lives. We are to love one another as Christ loves us.

As members of the Church, we are the Body of Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, we are sanctified in Christ and made worthy to give thanks and praise to God the Father.

Key Terms

BAPTISM

Sacrament by which one is reborn into new life in Christ (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1277).

COVENANT

Solemn agreement between God and humanity, establishing a relationship based on mutual commitments and guarantees (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 71).

SEAL OF THE LORD

The indelible spiritual mark conveyed through Baptism as belonging to God (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1274).

Voices of Faith

Our nature had truly fallen, and had fallen with an incurable fall, and it needed only that powerful hand. For the only way to raise it up was for the one who had shaped it in the beginning to stretch out a hand to it and shape it perfectly all over again through the rebirth of water and the Spirit.

—Saint John Chrysostom

Christ is the center of the economy of salvation, the recapitulation of the Old and New Testaments, of the promises of the Law and of their fulfillment in the Gospel: he is the living and eternal link between the Old and the New Covenants.

—Pope John Paul II

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 56 (Covenant with Noah), 59 (with Abraham), 62 (with Israel), 66 (new Covenant in Christ for all), 1094 (Old Testament covenant images prefiguring Christ)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 15, especially the section entitled, "Dying and Rising with Christ," pages 183–184

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church: 7 (Covenant with Noah), 8 (successive covenants), 252 (Baptism), 253 (Baptism prefigured in Old Testament)