

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our couples who are marking anniversary milestones of marriage this year. Last Sunday, the following couples were honored and recognized at the 9:30am and 11:30 (Spanish) masses, respectively: **Jean & Don Tomatis (63 yrs); Kathy & Harry Schiedek (48 yrs); Jill & John Clardy (40 yrs); Judith Ann Berry & Anthony Michael Price (25 yrs); Kim & Raul Velez (25 yrs); Antonia & Julio Alcazar (51 yrs); Hilda & Juan Castillo (40 yrs); Marta & Joaquin Camara (40 yrs) Adela & Ruben Carlos (35 yrs); Cecilia & Hugo Hidalgo (30 yrs); Balbina Quintana & Ernesto Ramirez (30 yrs); Damaris & Eric Espinoza (20 yrs); and Fabiola & Alvaro Calderon (15 yrs).** We are grateful for the personal witness of these couples and all couples of our parish as you bear witness to the beauty of married life.

In his homily of June 2, 2014, Pope Francis said, "...Married life must be persevering, because otherwise love cannot go forward. Perseverance in love, in good times and in difficult times, when there are problems: problems with children, economic problems, problems here, problems there - but love perseveres, presses on, always trying to work things out, to save the family. Persevering: they get up every morning, the man and the woman, and carry the family forward." As the Church dedicates this year specially to the intercession of St. Joseph, let us ask the Holy Family to continue to watch over, strengthen and bless all our families!

Alas, we have entered into this holy season of Lent, a time of purification and recommitment to a conversion of heart and greater openness to God's presence in our lives. The Church affords us this wonderful opportunity for a more introspective reflection of our Christian discipleship and how it can be made even stronger through this time of penance and outward signs of both self-denial and service to others. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, "*The seasons and days of penance* in the course of the liturgical year (Lent, and each Friday in memory of the death of the Lord) are intense moments of the Church's penitential practice. These times are particularly appropriate for spiritual exercises, penitential liturgies, pilgrimages as signs of penance, voluntary self-denial such as fasting and almsgiving, and fraternal sharing (charitable and missionary works)." [CCC #1438].

Today's first reading from Genesis has God telling Noah and his sons that he will forge a covenant with them. He promises that the covenantal bond will protect all of creation, including all the creatures that were present on the Ark. The sign of God's love and fidelity is meant for every generation until the end of time. A subtext to this promise and bond God made is a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness on God's part. This reminds us that although we are sinners and in need of a continual conversion of heart, we are also joy and hope-filled pilgrims. 1 Peter accentuates this latter point by stating to the Christian community that "Christ suffered for our sins once, the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous, that he might lead you to God."

The Navarre Bible commentary on the New Testament offers this helpful context for today's second reading. "The expression 'spirits in prison' has been interpreted in a number of ways: these spirits may be the souls of the just of the Old Testament, who were held in the bosom of Abraham. That is the interpretation given by some Fathers of the Church. But the words may also refer to the fallen angels who were confined in the darkest depths - in which case the letter is underlying Christ's victory over the devil. The waters of the flood are a figure of those of Baptism: just as Noah and his family were saved in the ark from the destruction wrought by the flood, now people are saved through Baptism, by which they become members of Christ's Church". Good News indeed!

It is no mere coincidence that soon after his Baptism by John in the River Jordan, the Spirit leads Jesus out into the desert to be tempted by the devil. We see the significance of the number forty, the Jewish people remained in the desert for forty years. Jesus wrestled with the evil one for forty days and triumphed over him and our Lenten journey consists of forty days. We can absolutely empathize with Jesus because we ourselves wrestle with temptation of some nature or another throughout our lives. This Lenten experience again helps us to reflect upon the implications of our own Baptism, and how we live that reality in a disquieting world. There are so many things, good and not so good, which vie for our attention and affections and we need to take time to pray, set our priorities right and discern where God is truly leading us. “Jesus’ temptation reveals the way in which the Son of God is Messiah, contrary to the way Satan proposes to him and the way men wish to attribute to him. This is why Christ vanquished the Tempter *for us*: ‘For we have **not** a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sinning.’ By the solemn forty days of *Lent* the Church unites herself each year to the mystery of Jesus in the desert.” [CCC, #540].

My prayer for each of us is to take this time of grace and privilege seriously and to see it as a time of possibility and hope...as we conform ourselves to be disposed to celebrating the great feast which awaits us!

Fr. Tom