

16. February 2021

“An ark is needed today too”

*Gen 6:5-8;7:1-5,10*

*Yahweh saw that human wickedness was great on earth and that human hearts contrived nothing but wicked schemes all day long. Yahweh regretted having made human beings on earth and was grieved at heart. And Yahweh said, 'I shall rid the surface of the earth of the human beings whom I created - human and animal, the creeping things and the birds of heaven - for I regret having made them.' But Noah won Yahweh's favour. Yahweh said to Noah, 'Go aboard the ark, you and all your household, for you alone of your contemporaries do I see before me as an upright man. Of every clean animal you must take seven pairs, a male and its female; of the unclean animals you must take one pair, a male and its female (and of the birds of heaven, seven pairs, a male and its female), to preserve their species throughout the earth. For in seven days' time I shall make it rain on earth for forty days and forty nights, and I shall wipe every creature I have made off the face of the earth.' Noah did exactly as Yahweh commanded him. Seven days later the waters of the flood appeared on earth.*

Yesterday we looked at fratricide, and today the reading of the day tells us how this evil grew among men, even to the point that “*human hearts contrived nothing but wicked schemes all day long*”.

How can this be explained?

When sin enters man's life, it spreads. It infects man more and more, and if he does not repent, it gets worse and worse. Let us think, for example, of the evil that was revealed in dictators of the last century. Evil grew to the point where millions of people had to give up their lives. Evil does not stop by itself, sin grows and it brings forth death (*cf. Jas 1:15*).

This is how it must have been until it came to this state that God, in order to save his creation, had to resort to the measure described in the text. We see that it was not simply an angry God who in his wrath smashed all that he had created, but the whole situation grieved his heart!

It is important, especially in the scriptures of the Old Covenant, that we always look at the heart of God and learn to understand it, so that a false image of God does not arise in us, as the devil would like to create.

God wants people to live; and he wants them to live according to his plan of creation. But when people abuse their freedom, destroying themselves and others, God intervenes at a certain moment, although before that, there is always the possibility of repentance for people.

Noah found favour with God. One was righteous before God. And God had Noah build an ark so that he and creation would survive the cleansing flood.

The image of the ark that withstood the flood is very popular in stories and children especially like to hear it. Again and again there are individual groups that see themselves as a kind of “arks” that want to resist the flood of sin in their time.

The church, too, was often understood as an ark that survives in the storms of this world and brings those who belong to it safely to the other shore. There are interpretations that like to transfer the events of the Flood as a purifying process to Holy Baptism: the baptism that washes away sin.

I would like to see Jesus Christ in the one righteous person who is modelled in Noah. After all, it is He who carries the sin of the world to the cross and cleanses us by His blood. In relationship with Him we come through this world of sin and when we are touched by it we can always receive forgiveness of sins.

He is, so to speak, the ark that saves us, that gives us security. With Him we do not need to escape this world either, but we can conquer it (*cf. Jn 16:33*). Since we ourselves often lack righteousness, we can always claim the righteousness of our Saviour.

Thus, to remain in the image of today's reading, God has given us in Jesus a heavenly ark that is safe; and his body, the Church, is also such an ark. Even if the latter can fall into hardship and confusion, if it remains faithful it will be carried through by Jesus. We remember the disciples in the boat, how they cried out in fear during the storm on the Sea of Genesareth, and the Lord stopped the storm (*cf. Mk 4,36-39*).

Another important promise the Lord gave us in the Book of Genesis when Noah stepped out of the ark and offered a sacrifice to the Lord: “*Never again will I curse*

*the earth because of human beings, because their heart contrives evil from their infancy. Never again will I strike down every living thing as I have done. As long as earth endures: seed-time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.” (Gn 8:21-22)*

We can rely on this promise of God!

However, we are called to live a life that does not cause suffering to the heart of God, that could hurt the so tender love of our Father.