

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Genesis 9:8-17

The judgement of God had fallen upon the fallen world with the waters. The sluices of Heaven had been opened, and the wrath of God poured out. And the whole world, overwhelmed with evil and ungodliness, had drowned and died; except for those few God had spared. He had warned Noah in advance about the impending flood, and instructed him to build the Ark and be ready to enter it with his wife and his sons and their wives. And He had had one pair of every kind of animal come and join Noah and his family in the Ark before His judgement fell upon the fallen world.

Nevertheless, in the perspective of Holy Scripture, all the world had drowned and died; this is the significance Holy Scripture ascribes to the Great Flood: that the judgement of God against all evil in the fallen world had been executed; that the whole world had drowned and died, utterly and entirely; or *all flesh*, as we hear it today that God said it.

And now the waters had withdrawn and a world born anew appeared out of the water, pleasant and pleasing to God, cleared and cleansed of all the evil and ungodliness for which His wrath and His judgement of death had fallen upon the fallen world. And so the life of the world could begin anew. God had spared a pair of every kind of animal so that they could reproduce and repopulate the world anew. And again, in the peculiar perspective of Holy Scripture, the significance of this is that God had had mercy upon the *whole* world; that the world had not come to an absolute end, but rather been born anew, out of its death and destruction.

And God had spared, also, eight of His most beloved creatures, that is: eight human beings, made in His own image, made for His love, to live with Him and serve Him in His love; which, in the same peculiar perspective of Holy Scripture, means that He had restored Mankind as a *whole* to live and serve Him in a new life, in holiness and righteousness forever.

This is the Biblical teaching of the *remnant*. We find it all over Holy Scripture. When God saves a portion of His people, and of Mankind, the significance of this is that He saves all that can be saved; whereas that which cannot be saved, because it is of the evil one, and, as such, intrinsically evil in itself, is destroyed and done away with; as precious metal is purified by the burning away of all impurity in it.

And God set His sign on the heavens, as we hear it, a bow of water and light, to seal His promise that *never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, as we hear it today that He said it; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.*

We call it the *rainbow*; although, were it not for Holy Scripture, we would most likely refer to it is an *arch*. That is usually how we refer to things of a similar shape, is it not?

Holy Scripture very deliberately uses the word *bow*, though. For in the imagery of Holy Scripture the *bow* is a symbol of war, alongside the sword and the spear. When God *breaks the bow* it means that He brings an end to war; and those who run away from war are said to *flee from the bow*.

The sign of His covenant of peace which God set in the heavens was a symbol of warfare, of warfare having been brought to completion, of enmity overcome. An instrument of death was made to be a sign of life and beauty by the light of God shining through the water, through the very means by which His judgement of death and destruction had fallen upon the fallen world.

As we know so very well, though, this was not the end of all evil. And God also knew very well that it would not be; that His history of salvation could not and would not end here. Holy Scripture tells us that after the Great Flood, but before He spoke what we hear in our reading today, the Lord said in His heart: *Never again will I curse the ground because of Man, for the intention of Man's heart is evil from his youth.* From our very first moment of being, in fact, we have it in our hearts and in our nature, each and every one of us, rivalry and rebellion against God, the lie of the evil one, that we ourselves should be alike to God in being lords and masters and judges of good and evil.

The world born anew in the flood was not a world without sin, not a world without evil. Nor was it a world in which sin was no longer under the judgement of God. And all through Holy Scripture the waters remained a symbol of death.

Nevertheless, the promise of God would stand: *Never again shall the waters become a flood to destroy all flesh, as we hear it today that He said it; the rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it so as to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.*

On the contrary, in the fullness of time, the waters of death and judgement would become a flood for the life and salvation of all flesh.

And this was exactly what God had in mind when He spoke what we hear today. *Baptism, of which this was an imagery, now saves you, He would have His holy Apostle Peter write of the Great Flood, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal for a good conscience before God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God.*

As the fulfilment of what the Great Flood prefigured, Baptism now saves us as the removal of sin and guilt and debt before the judgement of God, and as an appeal for a good conscience. And this it does *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into Heaven and is at the right hand of God.* The Son of God, Himself God from eternity, came down from Heaven and was born into our kind, and baptised into us, and into our sin, to take it upon Himself and bear it for us, and His own judgement against it, eternal death and damnation, that is: the fullness of death and destruction, the hatred of His holiness and goodness against evil.

For what the Law could not do, weak as it was because of the flesh, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, that God did, in that He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an atoning sacrifice for sin, and thus condemned sin in the flesh.

In Him the sin of *all flesh* has been duly judged and damned, that is: of all sinners, that is, again: of all of Mankind. The price and penalty has been paid, in full and in abundance. All that we owe to God, He has presented and presents to God, to the Father, and to Himself. And so we are right with God and righteous before His judgement, who shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead; for He has Himself borne all judgement for us. Baptism now saves us as *an appeal to God for a good conscience*, His own appeal and plea before His own throne of judgement.

As He was baptised into sinners and made one with us in all that was ours, so He now has sinners baptised into Him and made one with Him in all that is His, His righteousness, that is: His innocence and goodness before God, and His heavenly Kingdom and His eternal life. The waters of Baptism, to Him a flood of sin and death and damnation, have become for us a flood of salvation, of forgiveness of sins, of righteousness, of eternal life with God in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. The cross placed upon us in Baptism, a symbol of sin and shame and death and damnation, has become to us the sign and symbol of salvation, of judgement and damnation dealt with and done away with, of sin and shame replaced with His own own holiness and purity, of eternal death replaced with that fullness of life which is His.

Him who know of no sin, as He has had His holy Apostle Paul write it, God made to be sin for us in order that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. And so we are that. He has been raised from death; for with His suffering and death the price and penalty has been paid in full for the sin of all sinners, and in abundance. And He is with God in glory, pleading before the Father what He has done for us in His death, in the fulfilment of His Baptism; not because the Father would otherwise forget, but because it is precious to the Father.

And as His Church, in the Word and worship of His salvation, we join up behind our heavenly High Priest and join Him in His plea and appeal before the Father for a good conscience for us. As His Church proclaims what He has done for us, for our salvation, we plead His love before Him, and what His love has done for us. As we return to our Baptism by confessing our Baptismal Covenant, that is: by repeating the words of the faith into which we were baptised, we plead and appeal to the history of His salvation, into which we were once baptised, and still are. We mark ourselves with the sign of the cross, with which we were once marked as His own, and still are. And God sees the sign of His covenant, of His salvation, and remembers, and saves.

I will remember My covenant, as we hear it today that He said it to Noah in days of old, and I will look upon it so as to remember the everlasting covenant. As He remembers His covenant, when we, as His Church, do that of which our Lord Jesus said: do this in my remembrance, and: this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for you, for the remission of sins. He remembers that all righteousness has been fulfilled by the Baptism of His own beloved Son, of which the Himself said that: thus it is right that we fulfil all righteousness, which was brought to completion in His death, of which He said: I have a Baptism with which to be baptised, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished. He remembers that it has been accomplished, and with it His own eternal will, which is and always was our salvation. God remembers, joyfully, His love for us, and what His love has done for us. The Father remembers joyfully the love the Son has shown toward the Father, and toward His most beloved creatures. At the sight of the sign of death and deliverance God remembers His goodness, and forgives, and saves.

Now, to Him, whose power works in us and can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, be glory, in the Church and in Christ Jesus, throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.