

## Homily Feb 18 2024 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent, Sacrament of the Sick

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I'll emphasize 3 things from the readings today. First there is a testing – those long 40 days of rain and beyond stuck in the ark and another 40 days for Jesus in the desert. It's not temptation in Mark's gospel. It's testing. The Greek word, Brendan Byrne says is *peirazomenos*. Many of us know that illness is like a testing, too—testing of our endurance, of our patience, of our good humour, of our resilience. War is also a horrible, man-made version of a tortuous testing.

The second thing is that people are hearing and responding to the Spirit in all of these stories. The Spirit keeps them faithful and tuned in to God's voice no matter the struggle. Noah, Peter, Jesus.

And third, today's readings all involve baptism, a form of death into life through water – the flood is like a big baptism of the earth. Peter's talk of baptism in Christ has him describing Jesus's spirit moving into the afterlife, in fact going to the very victims of the flood from Noah's time. And we're part of this, in our spirits. And finally, Jesus' own baptism when he hears the spirit call him “beloved” just before the Spirit drives him into the period of testing in the desert.

And what comes up for me from the testing, and the listening and movement of the Spirit and the third theme of baptism is that, like prayers said over holy water, love moves through time and space. It does this with water, with light, with energy that we feel through prayer in our

bodies. Though the pain of emotional and physical wounding is real, is a testing, and the Spirit shows up. Just like the rainbow, a sign of God's promise made with water and light, the oil we use today is a sign of God's healing presence in Christ. Sylvia Keesmaat, scholar and professor of biblical studies says that the Flood is about God's grief and commitment to a broken world. The rainbow is --the FIRST covenant between Creator and the Earth and all living things.

Jesus' power of love and healing in the afterlife, and still present in the here and now through the Spirit, is also a covenant between the Source of All Being and the Earth, including us.

With the trust that God can be present to us in Spirit in our pain and struggles, even as today's stories explain God's faithfulness through that flood, through Jesus' death and resurrection and through Jesus' testing in the desert, we will pray for God's healing presence. And whether it is physical, emotional or spiritual wounding, our **own** suffering or the suffering of someone else, somewhere else in the world that you bring forward with your heart today, I'll say it again, we trust that the Spirit will heal and be present through this time of testing. Keep in mind the vulnerability of the psalm: I lay open my whole life to you, trusting you O Holy One ("I Lay Open" Bruxvoort-Colligan)

We won't be sharing our stories today, but I will give a few moments now to ask Jesus what he would like to heal for you or through you.

Basically bring to mind an intention for healing. What pain, sickness, situation of war or violence do you want to pray for and then I'll explain the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil ritual.

## RITUAL

We begin with silence and the raising of our hands for one another for about 30 seconds. Then Those who would like me to place my hands on their head for prayer, I'll ask that you place your hands on your lap palms up and I'll come around the room to lay my hands on you.

Then we'll all receive an anointing on the forehead and hands. This is a sign of Christ's forgiveness and also that we are all healers through forgiveness of one another. We'll do this as though for communion, but I'll first visit those who prefer to remain seated. I'll ask the last person to receive the oil to anoint me.