

Genesis: Noah and the Flood

Friday 21st August 2020



If you still can't guess from the picture above, today's biblical tour of Genesis will be reflecting on Noah and the flood. Before we read chapters 6 – 9 of Genesis let's begin in prayer.

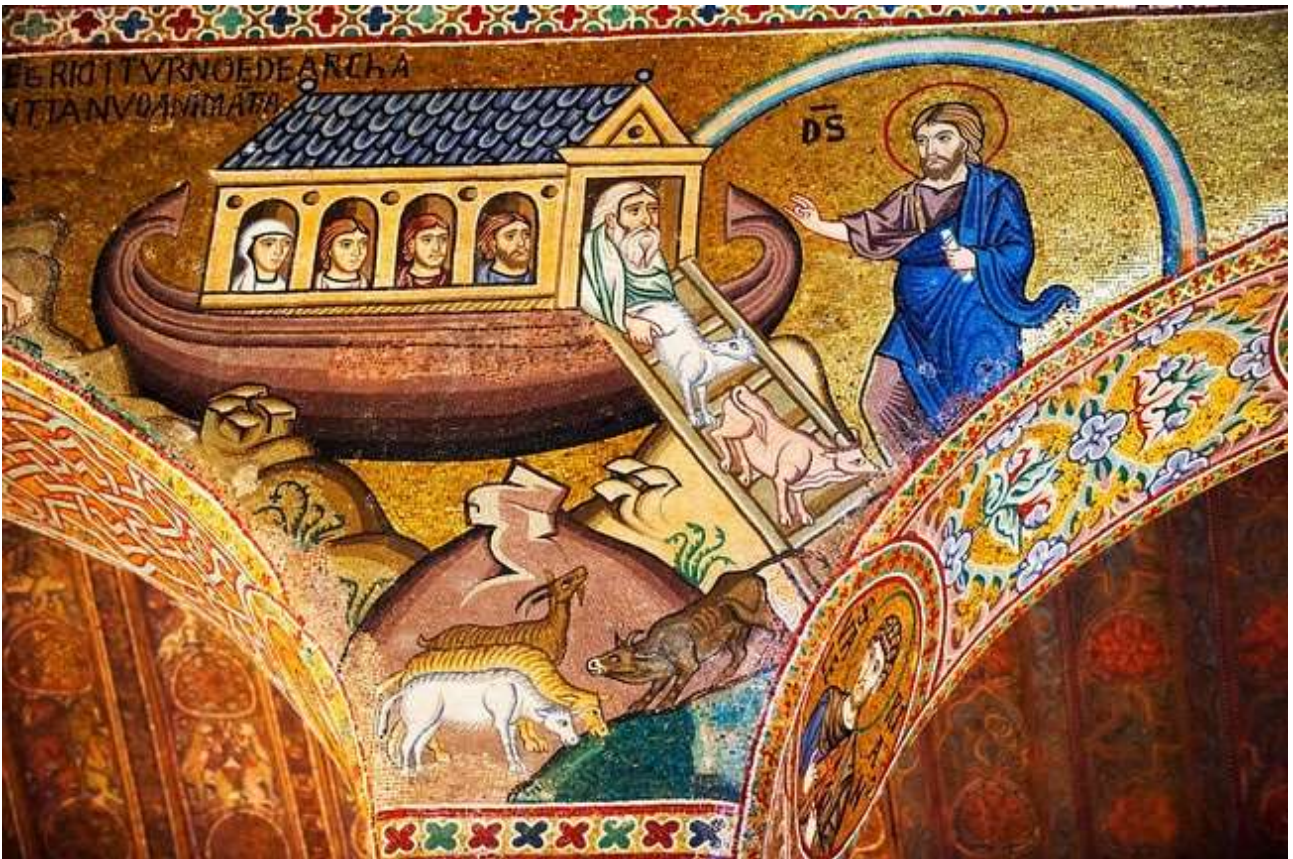
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Come, O Holy Spirit,
and fill us with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom.
Strengthen us, we pray, with heavenly grace,
so that we may grasp with our minds,
treasure in our hearts,
and carry out in our deeds,
all the teachings of your Holy Book
which lead to salvation.
Amen.

This episode in Genesis continues to illustrate how deeply the human family has fallen into sin.

'God said to Noah, 'The end has come for all things of flesh; I have decided this, because the earth is full of violence of man's making, and I will efface them from the earth.' (Gn 6:13)

The sinful disobedience of Adam and Eve continues to reverberate through each generation of the human family. God's sees the violence that mankind has freely chosen to initiate and inflict upon itself and therefore decides to '*efface them from the earth.*' However, '*Noah was a good man...and he walked with God.*' (Gn 6:9). God sees in this good man hope for the world and decides that humanity will survive through Noah's family. Noah is told to build an ark which God will use to save both his family and members of the animal kingdom.



Two of the early church Fathers, Saint Cyprian and Saint Augustine, put forward allegorical interpretations about Noah and the Ark. Cyprian wrote that the ark was the image of the one Church who saves her children through the Sacrament of Baptism. As the flood waters purified the earth from sin so the waters of baptism continue to purify and redeem God's faithful.

Saint Augustine described that just as the family of Noah were saved by water and wood so are the family of Christ. On the wood of the Cross Jesus died for our sins and from his pierced side flowed blood and water that gave life and grace to the Sacraments like Baptism. Augustine also wrote that just as,
'...every kind of animal was aboard the ark, so believers from all nations are enclosed in the ark of the Church.' (Against Faustus XII)

Saint Cyprian and Saint Augustine in their allegorical interpretations were not totally innovative but just simply building on what the writers of the New Testament had already begun to do. For example:

'Now it was long ago when Noah was still building the ark...That water is a type of the baptism which saves you now, and which is not the washing off of physical dirt but a pledge made to God from a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ...' (1 P 3: 20-21)

Returning back to today's Genesis narrative we see that the flooding of the earth begins when it rains for forty days and forty nights and then only after a further 150 days do the flood waters begin to recede. At this point God the Creator re-creates!

'But God had Noah in mind, and all the wild beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. God sent a wind across the earth and the waters subsided.'
(Gn 8:1)

Compare the above verse with Gn 1:2 and Gn 1:9-10 and you will see that God has not given up on weak and sinful humanity but mercifully begins to restore creation with Noah, the righteous man, and his family.



To make sure it was safe to disembark Noah sent out a raven and then a dove. On the dove's second trip out from the ark it returns to Noah with an olive branch in its beak. That small branch must have filled Noah with such hope and joy because not only did it show that the flood waters were receding and life was emerging again but the olive was also a symbol of peace. The broken relationship between creation and Creator, caused by humankind was, beginning to heal.

'God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth.' (Gn 9:1) Just as God allowed Adam the dignity of sharing in the work of creation:

'So from the soil the Lord God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it.' (Gn 2:19)

So now He allows Noah the privilege of also being involved in the work of creation by repopulating it and returning those animals he had saved. In the poetry of Genesis we see a God who is not petulant or a distant deity but one who constantly reaches out to His Creation to give it a second chance and grow from its past mistakes. Cain who murders his brother is given a mark of protection when he cries out to God; After the Fall God continues to watch over Adam and Eve in their exile from Eden and now in this episode with Noah and the Flood, God reaches out again with the rainbow.

'God said, 'Here is the sign of the Covenant I make between myself and you and every living creature with you for all generations. I set my bow in the clouds and it shall be a sign of the Covenant between me and the earth.' (Gn 9:12-13)

Although the evil in the human heart continues to flourish, God promises that never again will he destroy the earth in a flood and the rainbow becomes the visible sign of that promise, that Covenant.

Some questions we may want to reflect on from today's Bible reading could be:

- What are the negative things in my life that need to be washed away so that I can be in a right relationship with God? Are they habits, relationships or self-indulgent distractions?
- Do I truly understand what happened at my baptism? Have I, as an adult, ever asked about the prayers and symbols that were used from the Oil of Chrism to the Prayer of Exorcism? Have I made time to research and seek out the answers to these questions?

The Tower of Babel is our next stop on our biblical journey as we continue reading through the book of Genesis.

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O'Brien