

## **RETREAT IN THE DESERT**

The first Sunday of Lent begins with a catechesis on the new beginning. The old world, marked by sin, was cleansed by the waters of the flood and we are saved by the waters of Baptism, Galilee hears the Gospel of God and the land of the dead the Good News about the victory of Christ over death.

Noah, the ark, water and the rainbow are the symbols of salvation. By saving humanity from destruction Noah symbolizes Christ the Redeemer of humankind. The Ark is a symbol of the Church, in which all those who want to experience salvation find shelter. The waters of the flood symbolize the waters of Baptism that destroys sin. Above the receding waters of the deluge was a rainbow - a sign of God's covenant with humanity; above the waters of the Holy Baptism shines the sign of the Holy Cross in which there is salvation. The crucified Christ embraces all humanity in order to "bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18).

After crossing the Red Sea, the people of the Old Testament were brought to the desert and tested for forty years. They left behind four hundred years of oppression and slavery in Egypt - (Genesis 15:13). After passing through the waters of the Jordan, our Lord is led into the wilderness, where he spends forty days tempted by Satan. Thirty years of hidden life in Nazareth has ended, and the time to proclaim the Gospel is about to come. After emerging from the waters of Baptism, we have left sin behind in order to begin a new life in the freedom of God's children.

The wilderness - the place of today's retreat - is a time of temptation and a time to experience God's providence. Although we are "in the midst of wild animals", the angels serve us (Mk 1:13), sent "to serve those who will inherit salvation" (Heb 1:14). The wilderness teaches that human being is the unity of soul and body. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deuteronomy 8: 3). Daily bread strengthens our body, and daily Word of God strengthens our souls. Without nourishing ourselves with God's Word we will fall on our way, like all those who came from Egypt but did not make it to the Promised Land - "they were struck down in the desert" (1 Cor 10: 5).

Our Lord passed the test in the desert with flying colors. Having experienced temptations, He now comes to help us (Heb. 2:18) calling us to repentance and faith. Our Lord also came out victoriously from the struggle against the power of death. Having experienced death for us all (Heb 2: 9), Christ went to proclaim the Gospel to "the spirits in prison" in the land of death (1 Peter 3:19). "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15).

Today, the Holy Spirit leads us - the children of the Church - to experience the Lenten retreat. We will face evil, but the Holy Spirit abiding in us since our baptism will protect us. We will be nourished by the Word of God and the Bread of the angels in the House of God, and when the time is fulfilled we shall announce to the world: Christ is risen from the dead, He is truly risen!