



**Lent 1**

# ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

***God does not forget His promises to us***

***Nor should we forget ours to Him***

***I will remember my covenant that is between me and you***

Using very human language, the editors of Genesis 9 give us an insight into the marvellous ways of God. The story of the rainbow in heaven (which in the Revelation of John [the Apocalypse] is located above the throne of God), is about God wanting to make sure ***He does not forget*** His promise not to destroy the earth again as a punishment for human sin. It is a way of stressing the Love God has for us, a love not diminished by our sins and lukewarm covenant living. God's saving plan for the salvation of all men and women will continue in human history despite the ongoing attempts by humans to subvert it. The narrative suggests that while God may be very angry with us, there will never again be a Flood.

That in no way suggests there is no punishment for sin. Far from it. As the Hebrew prophets go on to teach, sin has its own inbuilt punishments. Because sin is a removal of God from the centre of our lives, of our decision making and a replacing of it with the self, God does not have to "smite" us. We go on to "smite" ourselves and our world because we were never created to have God on the periphery of life. A quick glance around the world at today's horrors and we will find in them the very real cancer of sin, of selfishness, hubris and the quest for power.

***I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life***

This is the kind of biblical Truth the world around us is never going to accept. In the West there is no longer anything close to being a universal truth. Truth is now what any individual wants the truth to be and we are all expected (under threat of legal action) to accept and to adjust our lives to accommodate these individual and personal "truths" (I was born a male but now feel I am a female - and so I am).

But Jesus had an answer to this search for truth when He responded to Pontius Pilate's question...*And what is truth?* The Lord's reply was succinct and eternal: *I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life*. The meaning and purpose of all human existence and being can be found only in Jesus our Messiah. Everything in life must be explored and evaluated in the light of Jesus, His person, ministry and teaching. All He is, all He has done and all He has revealed to us comes from the Creator and Fatherly God. The only way we can enjoy the blessings of a world renewed and transformed in Christ is by abiding by His Truth.

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This is why today's magnificent psalm pleads to God that we might *know your ways O Yahweh*. We want to and need to know *your paths and your truths* if we are to find peace and joy in this life and in the next. The problem is not that God is an unwilling teacher. The reason the world is not being shaped by this divine wisdom is because it is only revealed to the sinners, to the humble and those in need of something more than their own reason and desires...*therefore he instructs sinners in the way.*<sup>9</sup> *He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way*. To know the will of God and to obtain the graces and strengths we need to follow that divine will comes only to those willing to acknowledge their sinfulness, confess it to the Lord and strive for an amendment of life. Not once, but each and every day of our lives. Only then can we live in the hope of divine guidance. Without that ongoing repentance, we find ourselves victims of our own pride and false certainty.

The end of verse five sets out the agenda for us...*for you I wait all day long*. And the sense of the Hebrew here is...I wait, and I wait and I wait and I keep on waiting for God to initiate what comes next in my life. I need to be humble enough to overcome the temptation to take matters into my own hands.

*but as an appeal to God for a good conscience*

The reading from **1 Peter** is a good lead into our Gospel, for it reminds us that it is not baptism that saves us through the washing away of our sins. Salvation comes from God's offer of a "good conscience" through the resurrection of Jesus as the Christ. It is Christ who saves us and the fruits of that saving gift from God are available only in and through our union with Him and in Him. That "good conscience" is the grace of hearing God speak to us, teaching us, healing us and calling us to service in the Kingdom. Baptism is not enough. Coming to Christ is not enough. What is needed is living in Christ, responding to the Spirit of the Lord as we strive for lives of faithful discipleship in a challenging world. What begins in Baptism continues until the day we stand before the judgment throne of God.

*And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*

It is thus no mystery as to why Jesus was led into the wilderness before beginning His ministry. It was the way of Israel before Him and has been the way of the faithful disciple of Christ ever since. The "wilderness" is a battleground in the Bible. It represents the areas of life where there are seductive and powerful alternatives to God that strive to lure us away from Kingdom living. It represents those areas in our own lives, in the life of the Church, where Satan has his most success. The characteristics of the "wilderness" are hubris, lust, envy, pride, slander, gossip or as Paul presents it in a positive format in **1 Corinthians 13**... *Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant*<sup>5</sup> *or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;*<sup>6</sup> *it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.*<sup>7</sup> *It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* Lent is about going to war in our "wildernesses" with God at our side.

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