

First Sunday of Lent – Year B
(Mar. 5, 2006)

Over the Rainbow

We've all seen the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, haven't we? Is there anyone here who has not seen *The Wizard of Oz*? And so we've all heard Judy Garland sing, "Somewhere over the rainbow." You remember, don't you, how optimistic the lyrics are:

Somewhere over the rainbow, Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.

Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away about the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.

Maybe you are all thinking, "What has this got to do with the First Sunday of Lent?" Here we came expecting to hear about penance and fasting and giving things up for the next forty days and he's talking about rainbows and lemon drops! What going on here?

Well, for one thing our first reading is what's going on. We hear God talking about a rainbow and promising never to destroy the people again with water. God promises that in the future, Noah and his family will not have to face the same kind of death and destruction that they had experienced in the flood and God says, "I will remember my promise every time I see my rainbow in the sky." In some ways, it seems to me God is challenging the people to dare to dream dreams that really do come true.

Keep that in mind now as we listen to Jesus in the Gospel. Mark tells us how he had spent forty days in the desert where he prayed and was tempted by Satan. I've often wondered why Jesus prayed, and I think it comes down to this. He is just beginning to understand the mission his Father is giving him – and it's a big one, to save the world. So, I'm sure he

feels he needs a lot of strength and courage to carry it out because it's going to be difficult, very difficult. As a human being, like each and every one of us, he knows he needs special help to do what the Father is asking him to do. And so, he prays. He prays. He gives us a wonderful example of what we should do when we feel overwhelmed by the demands of our lives. Pray. Pray for strength and courage, just as Jesus did. Pray for confidence when we feel inadequate as we face the demands of our Christian ideals, as we come to understand that it is not always easy, perhaps never easy, to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves

When Jesus comes out of the desert, Mark tells us his first words are, "This is the time of fulfillment. The Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the good news," Jesus tells us three things. It's time; repent; believe.

It's time. Time for what? Time for the kingdom of God which is already here in your midst. Time to repent. That means to turn away from the things we have done wrong, the things that come between us and other people, the things that come between us and God. And it's time to believe. Believe the good news that Jesus is bringing. That means that just as we turn away from the things that are wrong in our lives, we turn to Jesus and what he asks of us: to accept the Gospel, to learn to love God above all and our neighbor as ourselves. And you know what? When we do that, then the kingdom that Jesus announces becomes real in our lives today and we help it to grow

Remember how *The Wizard of Oz* ends? Dorothy returns home and she learns that she doesn't have to go over the rainbow to find the happiness she is looking for. It's right there in her own home, in her own back yard. Maybe during this Lent we can find that the dreams that we dare to dream really do come true right in our own back yard as well. Maybe you could all join me in this kind of a Lenten practice: to get along better with the people around us, our parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, and from the grown-ups side, with our children, our husbands and wives, our students, our patients, our bosses, our employees – whatever. Anything we can do to make people happier, to bring people together will help in spreading the kingdom of God, will make our world a better place to live in – and we all want that to happen, don't we?