

OUT OF EGYPT

A Lenten Reflection on the Exodus and the Spiritual Life

“The Lord went in front of them . . .”

The Passover and the Departure from Egypt

The Mystery of the Passover

- Moses foretells one more plague: the death of the firstborn
 - every first-born, among men and beasts
 - will make the Egyptians eager to see the Israelites leave
 - God promises to protect the Israelites
- Biblical text moves immediately to instructions for the Passover
 - the calendar is reorganized: the month of the Passover becomes the first month
 - every family procures a lamb
 - slaughtered in the evening ≈ the beginning of something new
 - blood placed on the doorposts
 - Paschal Lamb ≈ Christ, sacrificed for us
 - blood on lintel ≈ sign of the Cross on forehead at Baptism
 - blood on doorposts ≈ shoulders ≈ bearing Cross with Christ
 - the Cross keeps away the Evil One
 - eat its roasted flesh
 - none left over to morning ≈ new meat, new beginning
 - with unleavened bread
 - Christ is the bread of life
 - no yeast: leaven was reused from day to day
 - new leaven ≈ new beginning
 - no remnant of evil in the new life of the Christian
 - seven-day festival
 - new creation
 - takes 7 days for new leaven to be ready
 - and bitter herbs
 - ≈ grief, repentance unto salvation
 - ≈ discover the truth of God’s help through trials
 - bitterness now = comfort later
comfort now = torment later

- eat the meal with loins girt and ready for travel
 - intent on following the Lord, not idle and lazy
 - present life is passing: we must be heading to heaven
 - ready to take on whatever God commands of us
- the Passover of the Lord
 - from slavery to the passions to the life of virtue
 - from this passing world to the kingdom of heaven
 - definitive Passover = death and Resurrection of Christ
- becomes a perpetual memorial feast
 - remember what God has done for them
 - remembrance (*anamnesis*)
 - not merely recollection of past events
 - proclamation of what God has done
 - making present the eternal mystery
 - this notion of *anamnesis* forms our understanding of the Eucharist
 - “Do this in remembrance of me” = “Do this in my *anamnesis*”
 - Eucharist is the fulfillment of the Passover
 - anticipates the final Passover = the fulfillment of the Church in glory
 - every Eucharist makes present the sacrifice of the Cross
 - “they shall eat it in one house . . .” = unity of the Church is necessary condition for celebrating the Eucharist

The Lord Cares for His People

- as he leads them out, God protects his people
 - he “reroutes” them
 - the “Via Maris” (the Sea Road) was the quickest way to Canaan
 - the Philistines, fierce warriors, lived on this route
 - God takes them by the Royal Road, the southern route, so they do not have to face battle until they are ready for it
 - Passover/departure falls on the 14th/15th of the month
 - lunar month: 14th/15th = full moon
 - in the desert, the full moon is quite bright
 - “the night will be clear as day” (Psalm 139:12)
 - full moon ≈ Church leading disciples in the darkness of the world
 - the Pillar of the Cloud
 - a column of cloud by day, with fire in the cloud at night
 - perhaps a description of an active volcano on the horizon in front of them
 - God appears in different ways at different times (St Peter Chrysologus)
 - the burning bush ≈ warm up unfaithful hearts
 - pillar of cloud ≈ cool the passions
 - pillar of fire ≈ remove darkness of ignorance
 - finds its fulfillment in
 - Christ, who is baptized in the “pillar of his body” (St Maximus)
 - Christ, the Light of the World
 - the Paschal Candle

- Pharaoh pursues the Israelites and catches up to them
 - finds the encamped by the sea ≈ the waves of temptation
 - the Israelites are frightened ≈ insecurity in the face of temptations
 - better to serve than to die?
 - no, better to strive for perfection although it is difficult
 - focusing on difficulties prevents some people from starting or makes them want to give up quickly
 - life of holiness proceeds by stages, not all at once, not all or nothing
- Moses reminds them that the Lord will protect them
 - we should expect temptations to follow us
 - in these moments, we must rely on the Law and guidance of God
 - gives leaders to his people to rouse them to courage
 - when we distance ourselves from evil, we see how much God helps us
 - not expected to fight on our own, but to “stand firm” and try not to fear

The Crossing of the Red Sea

- Moses is commanded to go down to the Red Sea and
 - strike it with his staff
 - the wood of the staff ≈ the wood of the Cross
 - the Cross conquers the world, the devil and his angels
 - lead the people across “with the water like a wall” (Exodus 14:22)
 - the Lord swept the sea with a strong east wind (Exodus 14:21)
 - this may be a description of “wind set-down”, a common natural occurrence
 - the Red Sea
 - could refer to the large body of water
 - also referred to the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqaba
 - the southern route would have led to the mouth of Aqaba
 - wind set-down along coast would have allowed them to cross
 - implies the site of Sinai in Arabia (Mount Badr)
 - not an easy experience
 - life will involve temptations and anxieties
 - follow the pillar of cloud ≈ Christ who leads us
 - crossing of the Sea is a symbol of baptism, even in the Scriptures
- the Egyptians are drowned in the Sea
 - conversion and Baptism requires a new start
 - Baptism erases the Original Sin and all personal sins
 - must not cling to old ways of life once we have turned to Christ
- the Israelites sing to the glory of the Lord
 - they have been truly saved and set free by the Lord
- remembering the Lord’s glory and power will sustain them for the remainder of the journey ≈ day to day life between conversion and heaven