

Homily For Tuesday of the 16th Week of Ordinary Time - Year 1

St Peter's 8:30 AM Mass - July 20, 2021

Ex. 14:21-15:21 "Sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously."

Exodus 15:7-17 "Let us sing to the Lord."

Matthew 12:46-50 "The one who does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and mother."

Neither Left Nor Right

Introduction

The Good News and the words of Jesus challenge us again today to make a radical decision. Are we depending on our family bond with Jesus, the fact that we are called Christians or that we are baptized into his family as brothers and sisters? OR, are we willing to DO the things it takes to look like a brother or sister of the saviour, to live like a brother or sister of the saviour?

It seems like this passage has come up on weekdays and on Sundays a number of times over the last year. It is obviously important, since it shows up in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. But, today, the Church gives us a particular way to look at its meaning. It gives us a lens to look through. That lens is the high point, the climax, of the Exodus story, the Israelites dramatic coming out of slavery.

Exodus

Let's focus in on the moment when the Israelites enter into the Red Sea on dry land. Everyone in both nations was used to the relationship of slavery. Pharaoh wanted to renew that relationship. The people were so terrified that they were willing to go back to slavery. For all of human history, this will be the same spiritual battle. Life is not satisfying in slavery but it is familiar and, in a strange kind of way, comfortable. We go there easily. The Church itself goes there easily. That's where the rest of the world hangs out.

So, at that moment, the odds are against the people of God. The odds are always against us UNLESS God is fighting for us. The verse I am suggesting as key today is this: "But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming

a wall for them on their right and on their left." Two things to note here. First, we see a new creation taking place. In the beginning, just before God creates the first living things, there was only chaos. But God made dry land appear from the chaos of the waters. So, the Exodus from Egypt is a new creation.

Second thing to note is that the waters formed a wall on their right and on their left. The people must have been terrified. They were ready to panic. They were ready to give up. What changed that? They have a lot further to go than just getting out of Egypt. They have only just begun the long journey to trust in God. However, they sort of trust Moses and, at that critical moment, that voice is something to hang on to: "Fear not. Stand by and see the salvation of God which He will show you today. God shall fight for you, and you shall be silent." And so they step forward.

At that moment, God makes the choice simple. Once onto the dry land between the walls of water, there is nowhere to turn. There is only death on the right and on the left and behind them.

Thirty-two times Sacred Scripture explicitly tells people to obey God's commands and to not deviate, neither to the left nor to the right, from obedience to God and worship of God. Forty years later, about to cross another body of water into the land of promise, Joshua tells the people: Be strong and courageous, careful to act in accordance with all the law that Moses commanded. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left. Remember also that Peter got out of the boat and walked towards Jesus on the waters of chaos. Only when he looked around him did he fall into the chaos.

Matthew

Now, let us take this perspective and apply it to what Jesus, the New Moses, says to the people. The message comes to him that his mother and brothers want to see him. They can't because there is a crowd around him. That's us. We are always trying to get to Jesus but are prevented by the chaos of the crowd. Some of those in the crowd are looking for the salvation, but many are trying to kill him and the message of freedom.

The chaos surrounds Jesus on all sides. Yet, he makes it simple for us. Access to the saviour requires one thing only. Do the will of the Father. Don't wander to the right or to the left. There you will get lost. There you will die with Pharaoh's army and chariots and chariot drivers. You will die in your sins.

We can get to Jesus any time makes clear the straight path for those right in front of him. Here is what you must do. Follow him. Whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my mother and brother and sister.

Call To Action

The straight path of discipleship IS terrifying, at least until we come to trust in God who saves us. What we should be afraid of is slavery to sin. We should be afraid of the chaotic waters to the left and to the right.

Eventually, those who cooperate with God's plan of salvation experience increasing separation from the chaos and from sin. And those who seek to thwart God's plan are thrown into the chaos. But the Lord is fighting for you. Listen to his voice.

We are to put our trust in God when our back is against the Red Sea. It is a metaphor of what God will do in Baptism. He will wipe away our sins like he wiped away that army.

We can't save ourselves. The Church can't save itself. Let us not wander to the right or to the left but let us sing with Miriam and with the psalmist: The Lord is my strength! The Lord is my song! The Lord is my salvation! Let us sing this song with Miriam and with Moses and with the Israelites and with all the saints, the holy men and women of history who did the same.

Key Scripture Passages

Entrance Antiphon: *You have done to us, O Lord, with true judgment, for we have sinned against you and not obeyed your commandments.*

Exodus: *Pharaoh and his army pursued them so as to enslave them once again. The Lord turned the sea into dry land by a strong east wind. The Lord threw the Egyptian army into panic, "The Lord is fighting for them against us." At dawn, the waters covered the chariots and the drivers, the entire army. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. The prophet Miriam took a tambourine and all the women went out after her. She sang, "Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously. Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.*

Psalms (Exodus): *In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries. The enemy said, I will overtake. You blew with your wind, the sea covered them and they sank like lead. You planted them on the mountain of your own possession. Let us sing to the Lord.*

Matthew: *Jesus' mother and brothers were standing outside wanting to speak to him. But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" He said, "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.*

St. Apollinaris: *This*