

Homily Saturday of the 15th Week of Ordinary Time

In today's Gospel we hear a passage from Isaiah echoing the Baptism of Jesus: "Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased."

In the Greek philosophical tradition, God is the supreme good around which everything in the universe revolves. But that Aristotle's prime mover would stoop down to the level of a creature and move toward him—that would be unthinkable. And in the Jewish context, God's absolute holiness was consistently contrasted with human sinfulness. But that God would himself take on the wretchedness of his creatures and stand with them—no way.

Yet, in Christ, God himself moves toward his creatures, takes on their wretchedness, and stands with them. Why? Because God has come in order to forgive sins. This is the heart and soul, the beginning and end of Christian revelation. How often the words and gestures of forgiveness radiate out from Jesus, and how central forgiveness is to the liturgy. "This is the cup of my blood . . . which will be shed so that sins may be forgiven."

With this in mind think of our first reading, where we continue to hear of the Lord's delivering the Israelites in the Exodus. In Moses, as in Jesus, God comes to his people to set them free. Egypt is representative of the power of sin that wants to have dominion over us. For 430 years Israel had been in Egypt where they lived first as an honored guest in Egypt (Gen 47:1–6) and then as an oppressed people (Exodus 1:8–14).

This is what it can be like for us living in the world. We live in this world feeling very much at home and welcome. But then we can realize the world apart from God is hostile to my true well-being. This is clearly articulated in the questions asked of parents in the Baptismal Liturgy.

- Do you reject sin, so as to live in the freedom of God's children?
- Do you reject the glamor of evil, and refuse to be mastered by sin?
- Do you reject Satan, father of sin and prince of darkness?

What then is the Church? We are that community on a journey from captivity in Egypt to our true homeland the New Jerusalem depicted so vividly at the end of Revelation 21 and 22. But we travel by stages and while in this world we need a home where we can dwell along the way.

It is interesting that our text from Exodus says the 600,000 travelled from Rameses to Succoth. Rameses was the one time capital of Egypt, from where the oppression of the Jewish people was orchestrated. They are delivered from Rameses and travel to Succoth. In Genesis 33:17 we read the Jacob, whose name is changed to Israel arrived at Succoth where "he built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth." ¹ This dwelling is where Jacob establishes himself after wrestling with the divine opponent in Genesis 31 and after having met his brother Esau in the earlier part of Genesis 33.

¹ [*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*](#). (1989). (Ge 33:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Just as Succoth was for the nation of Israel their first resting place after being delivered from Rameses, so too for Jacob. It was his first resting place after being delivered from the bondage of his estrangement from Esau.

May I suggest the same is true for us, The Church is Succoth, which is that community where with the Lord we keep vigil, that is, we keep watch through this earthly journey, We know that Jesus is with us because he has entered all the way down into Egypt so as to deliver us from its bondage and feeds us with the unleavened bread representative of our deliverance in the Eucharist.