

HOLY SATURDAY NIGHT 2010.
Exodus 15:1b-18; Luke 24:1-12

There are two magnificent images driving tonight's feast. The first is the story from the Exodus and the second is the image of the fire, the light in the darkness. Both are worth reflecting upon as we contemplate what God has done for us in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus who is the Christ.

Tonight's reading from Exodus is a song that was sung immediately after the Hebrews had crossed safely through the waters of the Sea of Reeds and stood back and watched the sea close over the Egyptians, destroying the last vestiges of their slavery and opening up the possibility of a new life of freedom.

Significantly the song begins with a theological statement that will steer the people through the rest of their journeying:

*Yahweh I will sing: he has covered himself in glory
Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea!*

That is the central message of all that we will read throughout the rest of the Bible and it is the spiritual message we have as the cornerstone of our spiritual lives as disciples today. God is victorious. Horse and rider", that is the forces of evil and darkness he has overcome. Victory belongs to God. The Hebrews did not escape from slavery, they were led to freedom and that is a very different thing indeed.

Later on in the song there is another great image:

*I will give chase and overtake, the enemy said,
I will share out the spoil, my hand will destroy them.
One breath of yours you blew, and the sea closed over them,
They sank like lead in the terrible water.*

Here the song proclaims the same message of the opening lines. The enemy are not pleased to see the Hebrews fleeing their land and want to bring them back and restore them to slavery. Not only that, they are angry and they intend to take out their anger on these former slaves. There will be a massacre, of that they are confident. And given the reputation of the Egyptian army and its massive size that would have been a foregone conclusion. The gods of the Egyptians would be victorious and the Hebrews would be destroyed.

What I like so much is the simplicity of God's response, the very simple way he dealt with this overpowering force launching itself against his chosen people. A simple breath of his mouth was all it took. He blew on the seas and the Egyptians were gone. He did not need an army of angels, massive earthquakes, flashes of lightning or any such displays of power. His people were set free by the gentle breath coming from his divine mouth!

The Hebrews did not have to fight a battle to secure their freedom. The breath of God set them free. That line alone tells us much about the theology of the rest of the bible. The people on their own were doomed to slavery. They cried to God and were set free. The message is as simple and as clear as that. The only time, in the rest of the bible that the people find themselves in difficulties is when they forget who is the author of their freedom. When they seek to control their own lives and destiny, when they take over and try to create a religious way of life that is more about their own comforts and preferences rather than one built on the covenant demands of God, they all apart, go into decline and end up in exile in faraway lands. They are the people of God and while they live as the people of God, the Almighty cares for them.

That is what tonight's feast proclaims to us. We are slaves of our sinful sides unless we allow God to step in and set us free, destroying as he does those inclinations and ways of acting that keep us from living in his peace. He sets us free in his Son who died for our sins. The great image for us is the body of the crucified Christ lying dead in the grave. He has gone. He is finished. It would seem that the forces of darkness have won. But then, in the quiet of the morning, with no fanfare, with no liberating armies, the Father raised the Son

to life and we have new life in abundance. We need no longer live grave-like lives but are invited into the light, or more correctly, to live in a way that the light of Christ can shine into the innermost parts of our lives.

Christ was not just victorious, he has destroyed the power of sin and darkness to have control over anyone who chooses to live in him. The forces of evil are defeated and it is simply up to us to choose to allow that victory to be complete in our own lives. God has fulfilled his part of the covenant arrangement, the rest is up to us.

The second great image is that of the fire burning in the darkness. In some ways the actions we undertake are a sermon in themselves. The darkness is there unchallenged. The fire is light, the Christ-candle lit and the darkness is forever changed. It is not destroyed but it has been overcome, pushed back like it was at the beginning of creation and now life can begin.

The model of discipleship that is on offer to us is the one acted out tonight. We follow Christ our Light into the darkness, processing behind him, each of us holding a share in that resurrected light, and little by little that light fills the dark corners of our cathedral. Discipleship is following Christ into whatever darkness there is in our lives and in the world. A single light brings some light but an army of light completely transforms the whole of our parish so that could say it is no longer dark.

In a way it is a very similar message to that of the first reading from Exodus. There is not a lot we can do about darkness. It is there and at best we can hope to live in it. I remember well the different way of living that goes with living in a village in Papua New Guinea when there is no source of light for the village or for the houses apart from small fires. You can move around but it is difficult and limited. Moving beyond the village square is even more difficult and tripping over roots and rocks is a frequent problem.

But then, if I was able to bring some kerosene along and a lamp could be found, what a difference it made! Suddenly the whole of the house was lit up and we could see. It was amazing how people would come from all over the village to sit in the light. It was a novelty. It was wonderful and they loved it. Light is good. Light is always better than darkness.

The key to the light in the village though is that those who want to sit in the light have to leave their own little fires and the comfort of their own homes and walk across to the other side of the village where the light is shining. There is a choice involved. There is a decision to make. One has to decide that the bright light of the pressure lamp is better than the smouldering coals of the fire in the house.

That too is what is on offer here. God offers us a light that cannot be dimmed, a light that will transform not only our own lives but will change the whole of creation. It will do that because it is his own divine light, a light shining in and through his Resurrected Son. It is his free gift of freedom from the darkness of our own lives, the darkness of our own community here in our parish family and from the darkness that so often come from being a part of a broader human community.

We might not always be able to accept that we have darkness within us that needs the liberation of the Light of God – but the Scriptures tell us that it is indeed there. While we choose to ignore it or even sometimes prefer it, seeing it more as light than darkness, then we will always struggle to know true and lasting peace.

As Jesus said earlier on in the Gospel of John: *I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life.* That is what we are celebrating tonight – an offer from God. An invitation to live differently a chance to move from darkness into light. The opportunity of a new beginning – if we want one.

Conclusion:

Tonight's feast is about God and what he is doing for us. It is also about choices. We can move on from tonight with nothing changed, with the feast having little impact upon us apart from its solemnity and beauty. Or, we can take to heart the invitation offered. We can have a new beginning, a taste of milk and honey, but we

have to leave something behind of our old lives and begin walking behind God, allowing him to lead the way forward. We can have new, brighter lives, lives that are lit by the light of Christ, but we have to follow him and walk in the light he casts off. If we stay as we are then we will find that what we think is good light is in fact gloom. We can manage. We can survive but we will not rejoice in the full victory that Alone can give.

Jesus Christ is risen today! Alleluia! Alleluia! Let us rejoice and give him the glory by a life that is changed by grace.