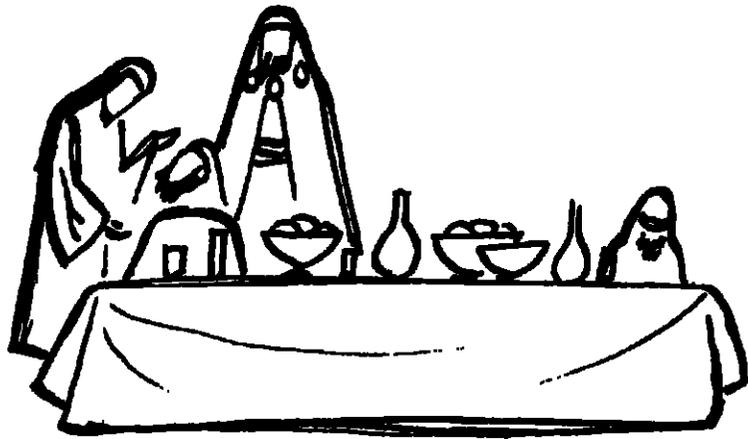


*“Do not be afraid to set your gaze
on the face of Christ” JP II*



Exodus:

*God's People on a Journey
from Slavery to Liberation...*

*from Fear to Trust...
from Exile to Homeland...*



Through Life

Through Death



To Resurrection

4

ENCOUNTERING GOD

Exodus 3:1-6



Moses had no reason to expect anything more - he had all he needed. He was content to look after Jethro's flocks had other plans for him.

Moses could have seen the bush burning and continued on his way - accepting it as "one of those things" - or something that "just happens"

But he didn't.

There were probably times in the years that lay ahead in which Moses heartily wished he had ignored the burning bush. But he didn't. Something attracted him - causing him to draw nearer - to see what it was and what was causing it. And, as he drew close, God called him by name - and drawing him closer still, brought him onto holy ground.

At some point in our lives - often when we least expect it - something happens. We sense that something out of the ordinary has happened - though we may not be quite sure what. We then have a choice - do we risk turning aside from the path we have laid before us to investigate - or do we ignore it and carry on our way?

Reflection

When have you encountered something out of the ordinary - and sensed that it is an invitation to encounter the Divine?

When have you chosen to allow yourself to "turn aside" to investigate?

When have you allowed yourself to be "too busy" to look?

In the latter cases - did God give up?!

Exodus 3:13-15

5

GOD REVEALS A NAME

The voice from the bush gives Moses a mission - but does not at once identify itself. Moses is, understandably, non-plussed. How can he undertake a mission on behalf of someone he does not know. How does he know that this really is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

In response, God gives Moses a name "I am who I am" - which can also be translated as "I am who I will be" - a God who cannot be defined - but who will gradually be revealed ever more fully through succeeding generations.

God is God - but during our lives, we give God different names - or see God in different ways. God is beyond all the names we can use. God is beyond any definition we try to impose. God is God.

CREATING A TENT OF GODS PRESENCE

Exodus 17:1-7

20

When it came to creating the Tabernacle, Moses does not demand that people give what is required - rather he makes it a matter of offering what hearts and spirits suggest. As a consequence, the offering proves to be so great that, in the end, he has to stop the people bringing more!

It is appropriate that offerings for the Tabernacle should be generous - this was the God who had liberated them and who was forming them into a people. This was the place where God was to show his glory to his people - to mark his presence among them.

Beauty and craftsmanship are powerful signs of our being made in the image of God. God is the Supreme Creator - and our creativity his gift to us. To spend time and energy on creating something for God can be one of the purest forms of worship. Allowing our minds and spirits to inspire our work invests it with generosity, love and adoration that makes our creation eminently pleasing to God

Reflection

When have you created something beautiful God?
Allow your heart and spirit to stir within you and see what they inspire you to create to the glory of God.



LIVING IN THE GLORY OF GOD

Exodus 17:1-7

21

The presence of God in the cloud stayed with the Hebrew people at every stage of their journey. For forty years they were to wander - but always in the knowledge that their God travelled with them. God revealed himself as a pilgrim God - not a static god, confined to places or buildings. This was the God who had revealed himself to Abraham - leading him on his own journey.

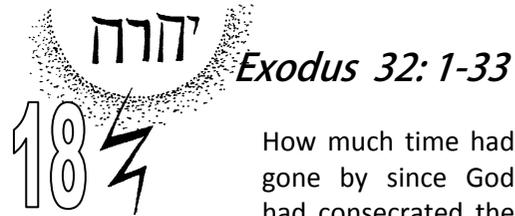
This is the God who reveals himself to us on our journey - a God who accompanies us - yet remains completely other. A God who loves and guides - challenges and surprises us

Reflection

How can you develop an awareness of living in the promise of glory?

What difference will this make to the way you live the rest of your life?

MAKING GOD MANAGEABLE



Exodus 32: 1-33

How much time had gone by since God had consecrated the

Hebrew people to himself and appointed them a priestly and holy nation? And how quickly had the people forgotten.

They knew about gods that could be seen and touched - who could be carried where they wanted it to go. They were less sure about a God who so obviously had a mind of his own. It was far easier to offer gold and create an image they could manage - than offer themselves to a God who was beyond their control.

We may not make golden calves - but we often succumb to the temptation of creating other gods and investing them with the power to save us. We offer them our "gold" - our time - our energy - forgetting the One who really has the power to save us - heal us - liberate us.

Reflection

What are the gods of our own society?

Which have you found yourself getting caught up with - willingly or by default?



Where was God?

RADIANT IN GODS LOVE

Exodus 34:29-33

19

No-one can encounter God without it showing. For Moses, the encounter was revealed in the radiance reflecting in his face - so bright that he had to keep it veiled. Such radiance is often represented on images of Jesus, Mary and the saints as a halo of light around their heads.

Most of us cannot aspire to such an obvious sign of God's love for us - and many of us would find it quite embarrassing to have attention drawn to ourselves in that way. However, we can catch glimpses of what lies at the heart of the halo and the shining face... just occasionally, we sense a glow - a warmth - a deep reassurance and sense of joy.

We can be quite surprised when we come back to this reality to see how small things seem - or, we may find that we see them as also reflecting something of the glory of God. The mystics often give such insights into a world that speaks of the grandeur of our God.

Reflection

When have you experienced a glow or sense of being taken out of yourself - either in prayer - or by an encounter with someone - or something?

Where was God?

Reflection

What names have you associated with God?

What images have you had of God?

You may like to try an exercise based on "I am who I am" "God is God".

Jot down your definitions - images - names for God: God is...

God was for me...

Now add the word "not" - closely followed by "God is God".*

How does this help you to grasp something of the transcendence - the utter "beyondness" of God?



BRICKS WITHOUT STRAW

6

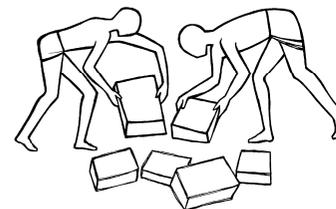
Exodus 5: 1-22

Moses and Aaron had done as God had required and told Pharaoh to let the People go into the wilderness for a festival to worship God. Pharaoh realised that there might be more to this. Also, if people had time to go off for festivals, they obviously had too much time on their hands and could not be working hard enough!

So, he gives orders that the productivity in brick-making is to be maintained - but the Hebrews will have to make up the shortfall in raw materials (straw) themselves. This, he sensibly reasons, will keep them far too busy to think about going off for a week to worship their God.

And - are there not parallels in our own day - when we need to work harder simply to stay still? When the poor have to work longer and longer hours to try to bring in a living wage? Where those in power use it to abuse their workers?

The list could go on!



Reflection

How is the "bricks without straw" situation replicated in our own day?

How can you ensure that you are not held bound by your "productivity" - or perceived lack of it when you take time out to fulfil your spiritual responsibilities?

If you are an employer - or person in authority over others - how can you ensure that employees have the time they need to worship God and to develop as whole people?

PLAGUES

7

Exodus 3:13-15



One plague after another - hurting the Egyptians but leaving the

Hebrews unharmed. Pharaoh promising to let the People of God go whilst the plagues were at their height - only to renege on the agreement when each passed

Our understanding of "plagues" has changed over the generations - but the desire to have a God who stands up for us has not gone away. Most of us are not oppressed - and perhaps find it hard to get into the mind-set of people who long for God to show His power and to bring down the proud and the oppressor. We may find it hard to think that God would be "cruel" and seek to hurt anyone.

God does not - but the God of love is also a God of justice - who hears the cry of the poor - who saves those crushed in spirit - who raises up the lowly from the miry pit - and so on. God does not choose to hurt anyone - but neither does God protect those who stand in defiance of Him from the consequences of their actions.

Reflection

- When have you yearned for God to step in and free you from people or situations that have oppressed you?
- When have you defied God - and then had to suffer the consequences of your actions?

8



PASSOVER

Exodus 12:1-23

A meal to celebrate deliverance - but prepared and eaten before the liberation has taken place. For it was the blood of the lamb that was at the centre of the meal that was to ensure that the Hebrew people were passed over when the angel of death visited Egypt. What emotions went through the hearts of the people as they followed Moses' instructions? Excitement? Fear? Bewilderment? And what did they feel when they heard the cries of their Egyptian neighbours as the warning became reality?

The Passover - a meal of celebration - but not a meal to relax over. A meal to remember - to sear an event into the collective consciousness of a people. A meal to remind them how dearly their freedom was bought.

Jesus' last meal was part of the Passover celebrations. What mix of emotions went around the Table that night? What were the emotions when the disciples returned to the Upper Room -₃

Exodus 19:1-9

CONSECRATION



16

The People of God still had a long way to go and a lot to learn - but God sees in them the potential to be his treasured possession - a priestly kingdom - a holy nation. He consecrates them to himself. They had done little to deserve such an honour: their departure from Egypt and the journey since had been characterised by argument and complaint. No-one deserves consecration. No-one can earn God's blessing. It is freely given and, often, holiness is a response to God's love rather than being a pre-requisite for it.

We too are chosen for holiness - not because we are already good - but because God sees in us the potential to be his eternal treasure. How we respond to that love is up to us - God will never force consecration upon us - he invites - loves - calls us to be his own - but the choice to respond or not is ours.

Reflection

How aware are you of being part of God's treasured possession? How do you react to knowing that you are consecrated and called to holiness?

Exodus 31:12-18

LIVING THE COVENANT

17

The section selected for reading comes at the end of the long detailed instructions given to Moses concerning how this new people are to conduct their lives. It begins with the Ten Commandments and goes on to describe how the people are to order their affairs and how they are to worship God. The whole of their lives - down to the smallest detail is to witness to the fact of their being a people living in covenant with God. And on one day each week, they were to be wholly God's - work was to be set aside and they were to be refreshed and renewed in worshipping the God who had liberated them.

We are inheritors of the Covenant and we too are called to witness to that in every detail of our lives. Our Sunday worship is essential - a time to celebrate the perpetual covenant between us and God. But the Covenant is not limited to Sundays!

Reflection

How well do you keep the Sabbath? How does the detail of your life bear witness to your living in covenant with God?

14 WATER FROM ROCK

Exodus 17:1-7

Water is one of the most basic requirements for human living - and the wilderness can be unforgiving for people who are unused to knowing where to look for it. The people react in the all too familiar way: It is Moses' fault. It is God's fault. Why aren't they sorting things out more efficiently? Moses is obviously beginning to get more than a little tired of this and asks God what on earth he is supposed to do with these people! God again gives a sign that proves irrefutably that he will not allow his people to perish in the desert. In the eyes of all the elders, Moses strikes a rock with his staff and pure water flows - enough and more for the People of God to drink. Dryness is part of the spiritual journey. There can be many causes - some of which we can deal with - and some of which require a patient waiting upon God. There is a temptation to cast around and find someone to blame - even if the someone is ourselves. Whilst there are times when we are at fault - there are others when it is simply that God is working at a lower level within us than we can be aware of. We have to wait until the moment when God invites us to strike the rock that is our soul - and find that the wellsprings have been waiting to burst forth anew.

Reflection

When have you experienced spiritual dryness?
How was it resolved?
Where was God?

15 SHARING THE LORD

Exodus 17: 8-13

The power of prayer is shown to the people as Moses prays over the battlefield until, eventually, Amalek is defeated. However, even such a powerful prayer grew weary - his arms became too heavy and for a time, it looked as if this weakness would lead to defeat for Israel. This was when the help of Aaron and Hur proved vital. As Moses grew tired, they supported him with their own strength - keeping him steady until victory was won. There are times in our own lives when our own resources begin to feel exhausted - we feel prayed-out. We know that prayer is needed - but are too weary to do it alone. At such times, the support of family and friends and our communities is vital. They can sustain and support us through the dark times - and rejoice with us when the better times finally come.

Reflection

When have you had to lean on the prayer of others? Who were they?
Have you thanked them - and thanked God for them?

and remembered the events of the night before and the day? How did they approach the Festival of Passover which began as night fell on the first Good Friday?

Reflection

Reflect on the feelings that surrounded the first Passover - and the Passover around the time of Jesus' death. When have you experienced festivals where sorrow and joy - anticipation and apprehension - have been inextricably bound? Where was God?



BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

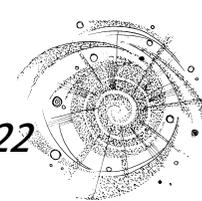
Exodus 14: 1-14

Any sense of liberation was to be short-lived. All too soon, Pharaoh changed his mind - yet again - and set off in pursuit of his cheap labour. He and his hand-picked army caught up with them as they camped next to the Red Sea. With the army on one side of them - and a sea on the other, it is not surprising that the Hebrews were afraid. And not altogether surprising that it was all Moses' fault! Still more galling must have been Moses' telling them that all they had to do was to keep still. Everyone has had experience of feeling trapped - between a rock and a hard place. There seems to be no escape - no way out. Teresa of Avila describes it as being beset all round - no way of escape - and resorting instead to sending her spirit upwards to call on God.

Reflection

When have you been caught between a rock and a hard place - beset by troubles and seeing no way out?

What did you do?
Where was God?



10

Exodus 13: 17-22

CLOUDS AND FIRE

Clouds and fire are mysterious elements. They exist for a while and then disappear. Yet, this is how God chose to indicate his presence at the head - and at times, at the rear - of the Hebrew people.

No-one can hold clouds.
 No-one can hold fire.
 Neither can anyone hold God.
 God is there, leading the people, but they cannot hold or possess him.
 God guides our lives too and his presence is equally mysterious. We try to describe how we perceive that presence - but stumble over words. God does not come in ways that are easy to explain - nor in ways that would allow us to lay claim to him.
 God is God. He is a God who leads and liberates - but is always beyond our desire to possess him.

Reflection

How have you sensed the God who guides and leads you?
 How would you describe it to another?

11 CROSSING THE RED SEA

Exodus 14:1- 15:19



The story of the Crossing of the Red Sea is a pivotal moment for the Hebrew people. Their situation seemed impossible - an army on one side - a sea on the other. Even the solution required a huge amount of risk - to walk onto the sea-bed - to see the water on either side - to know that a great army is following behind.

Few of us experience such a dramatic act of God - but many of us will have times when we are beset and beleaguered on all sides - and when the path ahead seems very narrow and dangerous. But, if we hold firm and take the risk of faith, we find that, eventually, we are brought safe to the other side.

Reflection

When have you had the experience of having to follow a narrow, dark and dangerous path through a crisis in your own life?

How did you feel as you travelled it?

Where was God?

To walk with only a small path lying ahead wondering whether the waves would crash back into place when you were in the middle of the sea - or whether the army would finally catch up when you had nowhere to run.

There is little wonder that this event holds such a central place in the memory of the Hebrew people and all who treasure their Scriptures.

OASIS

Exodus 15: 26-27

12



After the trauma of leaving Egypt - the Crossing of the Red Sea, the people need time to rest. They arrive at Elim and camp by the water of the twelve springs and seventy palm trees.

When we have gone through pain and trial - or even just had a difficult day - we too need time to rest and be refreshed.

Reflection

When have you have times of blessed rest?

Take time today to rest by waters - (even if that is only a soak in a bath!)

Reflect on the times when God has given you peace and rest. When you sleep - be aware that you sleep in the love of God.

13

Exodus 16:1-36

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

It does not take long for the Hebrew people to forget what God has done and to look back wistfully for the times of plenty in Egypt. God hears their complaints and promises that they will not starve in the desert but will eat their fill twice a day - bread in the morning - quail in the evening.

and that God had to point out that he had provided food. All they had to do was see it and use it! We too can spend so long looking back to golden days - and forward to a rosy future - that we wonder why living in the present does not match up. We too need to look and see what God has given to us - gifts under our very noses that we have failed to see and use to enrich our lives.

Nostalgia can be a dangerous thing! Looking back to the past can be a blessing - but we run the risk of seeing everything as better then and failing to see the gifts around us in the present.

The people had no experience of living in the desert - anything they had wanted in Egypt they bought or grew... Could it have been that both manna and quails were already there -

Reflection



Those who follow a Eucharistic tradition centre their worship on sharing bread and wine - seeing in them the ultimate gift of God.

Reflect on the food you eat - if you are what you eat, what are you?!