

3rd Sunday of Lent, Year C, March 24th, 2019

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

Last week's OT reading recalled God's promise to Abraham that He would give a land to his descendants. Because Abraham doubted, not only would the land go to his descendants (and not to him), but his descendants would go into Egypt for four-hundred years before they would be brought out by God to enter the Promised Land. That time has been fulfilled in our present reading from Exodus and Moses is the descendant of Abraham who is entrusted with the task of leading his people out of bondage.⁴

1Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian. Moses was born an Israelite but raised as an Egyptian noble. When he was 40 he killed an Egyptian who was beating up on an Israelite. He fled for his life and ended up in Midian where he married the daughter of a pagan priest. For forty years he was a wandering shepherd following his father-in-law's flocks, so at this time he was about 80.⁷ **Leading the flock across the desert, he came to Horeb,** This is also called Mt. Sinai and it is where the Commandments will be given after the people flee Egypt.¹ **the mountain of God.**

2There an angel of the Lord appeared Since God is invisible, He is discovered to be present in the angel of the Lord, but it is God who will speak.³ **to Moses in fire** Fire is often a feature of meetings between God and man.³ **flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed.** The bush would be one of the many thorny shrubs that grow in desert uplands in that region. Some Christian writers have seen in the burning bush an image of the Church, which endures despite the persecutions and trials it undergoes. It is also seen, according to St. Bede, as a figure of the blessed Virgin, in whom the divinity always burned.³

3So Moses decided, "I must go over to look at this remarkable sight, and see why the bush is not burned."

4When the Lord saw him coming over to look at it more closely, God called out to him from the bush, "Moses! Moses!" The repetition of his name stresses how important this event is.³ He answered, "Here I am."

5God said, "Come no nearer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. Moses takes off his shoes, which is an act of reverence and conveyed to God his unworthiness. In some Byzantine communities there was a custom for a long time of celebrating the liturgy barefoot or wearing different footwear from normal. Christian writers have seen this gesture as being an act of humility and detachment in the face of the presence of God, for "no one can gain access to God or see him unless first he has shed every earthly attachment."³

6I am the God of your fathers," God was faithful in the past and He will be in the future. He is always there for His people. **he continued, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob."** This is important because Moses is not the founder of a new religion, rather, he carries on the religious tradition of the patriarchs, confirming the election of Israel as the people of God.³ **Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

7But the Lord said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt Egypt is a biblical symbol of evil and the oppression of sin.⁴ **and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering.** The Catechism says that there are "sins that cry to heaven: the blood of Abel, the sin of the Sodomites, the cry of the people oppressed in Egypt, the cry of the foreigner, the widow, and the orphan, injustice to the wage earner."⁵ (CCC 1867)

8Therefore I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians. The time spent in Egypt allowed the Israelites to multiply numerically without attracting attention in Canaan. Some 70 went into Egypt (Ex 1:5) and some 600,000 men plus women and children came out according to Numbers 1:44. **and lead them out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey.** This description of the promised land is meant to show that it is extensive and fertile. Its fertility can be seen from its basic products—milk and honey—ideal desert foods, and a land which produces them in abundance, is seen as a veritable paradise. The number of nations inhabiting the promised land and disputing over it gives an indication as to its extent and desirability.³

13Moses said to God, “But when I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ if they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what am I to tell them?”

14God replied, “I am who am.” The name He gives is “Yahweh” in Hebrew which we translate as “I Am Who Am.” In Greek we translate it “Lord.”⁶ This divine name is mysterious just as God is mystery.⁵ (CCC 206) **Then he added, “This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you.”**

15God spoke further to Moses, “Thus shall you say to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; thus am I to be remembered through all generations.” Enosh, a grandson of Adam, was the first to call upon the name of the Lord as “Yahweh”. At least a part of mankind knew the true God.³ All the details in this passage help to bring out the simplicity and at the same time the drama of God’s action, for the scene is quite ordinary (grazing, mountain, a bush...), but extraordinary things happen (the angel of the Lord, a flame which does not burn, a voice).³

1 Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12

There is a principle that the New Testament lies hidden in the Old Testament and that the Old Testament is unveiled in the New Testament.⁵ (CCC 129) Paul interprets all of the images and events in the light of Jesus so he consequently attributes Christian significance to them (called typology) and speaks of the crossing of the Red Sea as a baptism. The spiritual food (manna), he sees as a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. The rock, he says, was Christ himself.⁹ (The Catechism says that the water from the rock was the figure of the spiritual gifts of Christ.)⁵ (CCC 1094) The effect is to make his readers realize that their ancestors had opportunities to follow God that were similar to their own and yet many perished.⁹

1I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sister, that our ancestors were all under the cloud. The cloud was a canopy of divine protection spread over Israel. Scripture associates the firecloud of the Exodus journey with the Holy Spirit.⁵ (CCC 697) **and all passed through the sea,** This was the Red Sea, across which the Israelites marched on dry land and in which Pharaoh and his army were drowned.⁹

2and all of them were baptized into Moses. This prefigures our union with Christ when we pass through the waters of Baptism.⁸ **in the cloud and in the sea.** The deliverance of Israel from slavery is a type of the Church’s deliverance from bondage in sin.⁸

3All ate the same spiritual food, This was the manna that fell from heaven and enabled the people to survive the long pilgrimage.⁹ It prefigures the living bread of the Eucharist, which nourishes us in the wilderness of this life.⁸ It has been estimated that every day it would have taken 10 trains of 30 cars each to provide the manna for the roughly 2 million Israelites and it continued for the 40 years that they were in the desert!

⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock. This was the rock that gushed forth drinking water for Israel by a miracle of Moses. Jewish tradition believed that the rock followed them as a constant source of refreshment on the march through the desert. It is ultimately a type of Christ, who pours out the living waters of the Spirit in Baptism and the sacramental gift of himself in the Eucharist.⁸ ⁵Yet God was not pleased with most of them, for they were struck down in the desert. 600,000 men left Egypt and after 40 years, only two of them entered the Promised Land: Joshua and Caleb. Paul is alluding to the great massacre of Israelites who rebelled against Yahweh in the wilderness as described in Num. 14:16.⁸

⁶These things happened as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil things, as they did. The dangers and judgments that Israel experienced between the Red Sea and the Promised Land show us that the Christian life is a probationary period of testing that stretches between our Baptism and our final salvation. Unless we fight the temptations that badger us along the way, we will fail to reach our heavenly homeland, just as many of the Exodus generation perished without crossing over into Canaan.⁸ Paul is warning the Corinthians that it is possible to lose salvation even after celebrating the sacraments.¹

¹⁰Do not grumble. Grumbling comes from a lack of gratitude. (They needed an attitude of gratitude!) ²as some of them did, and suffered death by the destroyer. The “destroyer” is the angel of God who inflicts the punishment of God on the worshipers of the golden calf, the ones who took part in the shameful rites of Baal of Peor, and of the grumblers who fell victims to the fiery serpents.

¹¹These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us, upon whom the end of the ages has come. The chastisement of ancient Israel was recorded as a warning to us to be on our guard.² We must learn from the mistakes and triumphs of our ancestors.⁹ The coming of Christ marks the last period of salvation history for he has said it all and there will be no new public revelation until he comes again. The coming of the Messiah and the New Covenant are what was called the “latter days” in the Old Covenant.⁸

¹²Therefore, whoever thinks he is standing secure should take care not to fall. Here Paul is warning against the sin of presumption whereby a man either hopes to save himself without help from on high or he presumes upon God, thinking that his sins will be forgiven without his effort or sorrow or amendment.¹⁰ He is cautioning the Corinthians not to assume that because God has given them a Baptism in Christ and supernatural food and drink in the Holy Eucharist, he will not judge their actions if they stray.⁴

Luke 13:1-9

The events related here appear only in Luke's gospel. His purpose is to provide a context for Jesus' call to repentance.⁹

¹Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus uses current events to teach spiritual truths. While neither Pilate's bloodshed nor the Siloam tower incident in verse 4 is known outside the NT, both examples are used to stress the urgency of repentance.¹¹

²Jesus said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? The people who mentioned this to Jesus probably wondered if the murdered Galileans died as a punishment for their sins. Jesus clearly denies this.¹¹

3By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, Repentance is a genuine sorrow for sin and a sincere determination to change one's life. It is shown by baptism, confession of sins, and the production of fruits worthy of repentance and good works such as almsgiving and the faithful performance of one's duties.⁶ **you will all perish as they did!** He means suddenly and without preparation. We pray for the grace of a happy death. That means with time to repent and the reception of the last sacraments. The dying need our prayers because Satan can be very busy in the final minutes as it is his last opportunity to tempt the soul. The sacraments of Penance, the Anointing of the Sick and reception of the Eucharist as viaticum prepare us for our heavenly homeland and complete our earthly pilgrimage.⁵ (CCC 1525)

4Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? The implication is that even Christians who are not great sinners still need to repent and to do so without delay.¹ We should be ready for death whenever and however it comes.⁹ A good habit to develop is a daily examination of conscience where we call to mind our sins.⁴

5By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Here Jesus is foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem which did happen in 70 A.D. While we cannot attribute human suffering to human sin, it is safe to say that the nation which rebels against God is on the way to disaster.¹³ Conversion is not acquired once for all; on the contrary, it must be renewed day after day.¹² Jesus used these examples to stress the urgency of repentance and he made it clear that not only grievous sinners suffer violent deaths. For all of us, to reject or even neglect Christ's call for repentance is to gamble with disaster. Death is always so close and there may not be time to repent at the very end so we must be ready. While last minute conversions are possible, ten minutes before the party is not the best time to learn to dance! The fig is one of the most common trees of Palestine and its fruit is liked and plentiful. It grows to a height of 35-40 feet and it has spreading branches and broad, thick leaves which afford shade in the summer. They are often planted in vineyards, since they flourish in stony soil. The fig tree carries fruit about 10 months of the year.⁶

6And he told them this parable: "There once was a person (God) who had a fig tree The fig tree represents Old Covenant Israel. Although God found no fruits of repentance, he was patient and gave them an ample three years to accept their Messiah. The impenitence of Jerusalem would later bring divine judgment upon the city when it was destroyed in 70 AD.¹¹ **planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none,**

7he said to the gardener, Jesus Christ is the gardener who continued to plead with the faithless people throughout his ministry which lasted 3 years. **'For three years now I have come in search of fruit** While Jesus is looking primarily for the fruits of repentance, we can also consider the fruits of the Spirit which are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.⁵ (CCC 1832) **on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down.** Jesus reminded men that they would be judged according to the opportunities they had.¹³ **Why should it exhaust the soil?"**

8He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it,

9it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.'" God returns again and again to offer us the opportunity to be productive, to bear fruit. Nevertheless, there is such a thing as the LAST CHANCE. If we refuse chance after chance, if God's appeal and challenge come again and again in

vain, the day comes, not when God shuts us out, but when we by deliberate choice shut ourselves out from God.⁹

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers: 1998" by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (3) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (4) The Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (5) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (6) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (7) "The Story Of Stories" by Karen Lee Thorp, (8) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The First and Second Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians" With Introduction, Commentary and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) "Workbook for Lectors and Gospel Readers: 2004" by Aelred R. Rosser; (10) "Responding to God" by the Dominicans of the Central Province of St. Albert the Great, (11) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," (12) "Saint Joseph Commentary On The Sunday Readings" by Achille DeGeest, O.F.M., and (13) "The Gospel Of Luke" by William Barclay.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.