

Homily081119

## TEN PLAGUES IN EGYPT

Do you remember the story of Moses and Pharaoh and how he pleaded for Pharaoh to free the Hebrew people from their slavery and how Pharaoh refused? God countered by afflicting the country with various scourges known as plagues. There were ten of them. And the last plague was that the firstborn child in every home would die. Every unprotected firstborn would die. The Hebrew people were to take the blood of a young lamb and put it on the doorposts and lintels of their homes. They would be protected from the Angel of Death passing over Egypt by the blood of the lamb. The Angel of Death would not enter any home so protected.

That is the reference in today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom. Wisdom says that God, through Moses, revealed to the Hebrew people what was going to happen. They heard and they obeyed. They did what Moses directed them to do. Their firstborn children were saved. The firstborn of the Egyptians died. Egypt's Pharaoh had refused to recognize the very Lord of Life. And because of that Egypt had become a place of death. There was nothing to be handed on to the next generation. There was no future there. The future belonged to those who heard and believed, to those who were God's faithful people. Not God's disobedient people. The faithful people experienced being delivered, experienced deliverance.

Our second reading refers to Abraham, our father in faith. Abraham lived about 700 years before Moses. It was with Abraham that God started the whole process of salvation. Abraham was asked to leave where he was, with his whole family and extended clan, and travel to a new country, a new land. And in this new land Abraham would become the father of a great people even though he was at that time already an old man. Abraham chose to believe God's word like the Hebrews in Egypt chose to believe God's word. It wasn't clear to Abraham exactly where this new land was, or how he would become the father of a great people or when all of this would take place. But Abraham decided that he would trust the word that was coming to him, that it really was from God and was reliable.

That is why Abraham is referred to as our father in faith. Faith is realization of what we hope for. And that is what Abraham hoped for. Faith is also the evidence of things not seen. So without seeing, Abraham believed. Although he did not live to see the completion of God's promise, he did live to see the beginning of it. He saluted that. It was enough for him. How about us? How are we when we do not know the where, the how or the when? How are we with not living long enough to see the completion of what God is accomplishing. Sometimes we do—like with the tenth plague. Sometimes we don't—like Abraham seeing only one child and not a whole clan of his offspring.

What is the message at the heart of our Catholic faith? Pope Francis said today that "Christian witness announces this alone: 1) Jesus is alive; 2) Jesus is the secret of life." That is it. That is what we believe. That is our treasure. And the gospel today has Jesus himself warning us to be vigilant. He means in the way we live our lives. We need to be aware, awake, alert, on our guard, watching for, attentive to, mindful of, prepared for. For what? For the working of the Lord in our midst; for the speaking of the Lord in our time. Here is the point: It is rare that the voice of Our Lord will come to us in and through our culture, and what our culture values and believes. God did not come in and through the culture of Egypt.

Our God is most often counter-cultural, as was the message of Jesus. That is why they killed him. He was a threat to the culture of his time. Going along with the culture though seems so logical and is accepted by so many. How can it be wrong? It all seems so vibrant. But so did Egypt and it was full of death and the Angel of Death had free rein. So did the power of Rome seem so invincible but it was not to last. The question is: who is the fool? Who really knows what is going on? Is it Moses or Pharaoh? Is it old and lonely Abraham? Is it Jesus who reveals that less is more and that humility is truth and loving the other, the alien, the immigrant is how we love our God and that being willing to undergo crucifixion out of love is what ultimately conquers? Whose message are we hearing? Whose message are we heeding?

We come each week to Eucharist. We listen to God's word. We are nourished here by God's Word. We are fed by the Eucharistic presence of Jesus Christ who lives. He is the secret of life. His way is the only way.