

The season of Lent will soon be drawing to a close. Will we be different afterwards? How will our lives be different at the end of Lent? Will we be spending more time in spiritual reading or reading Scripture? Devoting more time to prayer and reflection? Will we be changing any of our firmly established behaviours? What is happening to us this Lent that will last beyond Lent for the rest of the year? The Scripture readings today are wonderful readings because they tell of people who were transformed, who experienced in their own unique way the graces that we hope to gain during our Lent.

In the first reading God reminded his people through the prophet how he led the Hebrews through the sea and the Egyptian chariots that followed them lay in the sea never to rise again (Isa 43:17). But then God, through the prophet, says there is no need to recall that exodus of the past because now God is doing a new thing, a new exodus (Isa 43:18-10). In the prophet's time many centuries later God's people are not enslaved in Egypt but are held in Babylon longing to return to Israel and God tells them the exodus of the past is going to become a present reality once again, because there will be a new exodus, this time from Babylon not Egypt. Therefore Isaiah says God is making a way in the desert and rivers in the wasteland (Isa 43:19). What happened in the past would become a present reality for them.

The exodus becomes a present reality for us also because when we are baptised our sins are washed completely away in baptism just as the Egyptians all perished in the sea. No sin remains after baptism but Lent gives us the opportunity to wash ourselves clean of the sins we commit after baptism and overcome temptations. The climax of Lent is Easter Eve, and part of the Easter Eve service is the renewing of our baptismal promises. Each year we have a time honoured opportunity to renew. So the exodus continues to be a present reality in the lives of all of us as we continually wash ourselves clean of sin. Naturally the best way to wash ourselves clean of sin is the General Confession so articulately put in the Book of Common Prayer 1662 and our more modern liturgies but also the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not commonly used in our tradition, but perfectly allowable. What better way could we find to prepare for renewing our baptismal promises during Easter Eve than having already washed ourselves clean of sin beforehand in the Sacrament of Reconciliation? The exodus becomes a present reality in lives at baptism and every time we renew our baptismal promises and overcome sin.

St. Paul also experienced an exodus in his life on the road to Damascus when Jesus appeared to him, and Paul requested baptism when he arrived in Damascus (Acts 9:18). In the second reading today he wrote: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ..." (Phil 3:8) What a transformation occurred in Paul. The reason he was going to Damascus was to visit the synagogues there and find Jews who believed in Jesus to bring them back to Jerusalem in chains (Acts 9:2). But look at him in the second reading today. "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ." He is totally transformed. Nothing matters to him but living his life with Christ. This leads us to ask ourselves, "Where is Jesus in our life?" Can we say that we consider everything in our lives as refuse or rubbish and we want only Christ? Is our love for Christ such that we can say like Paul we want to share the sufferings of Christ and his resurrection? How will our lives be different at the end of Lent? What is happening to us this Lent that will last beyond Lent for the rest of the year?

The woman saved from death by Jesus in the Gospel (John 8:1-11) certainly experienced an exodus, leaving the past to live a new life. Jesus said to her, "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Jesus challenged her to move from one type of life to another, to move from sin to a life of grace. We are not told what happened afterwards because it does not matter to us. What matters to us is that we make this meeting with Jesus a present reality in our lives. What matters is that we hear Jesus saying to us that he doesn't condemn us but asks us to sin no more. The transformation that Jesus asked of the woman is the transformation that Jesus asks of us. Lent is the season of personal transformation. Can you make that story of Jesus and the woman a personal reality in your life? "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." (John 8:11)

The season of Lent will soon be drawing to a close. The Scripture readings today are wonderful readings for Lent because they tell of people who were transformed, who experienced in their own unique way the graces that we hope to gain during our Lent. God promises in the first reading that the lives of his people will be transformed because they will experience a new exodus and freedom from Babylon. In the second reading Paul shares the testimony of the transformation that took place in his life. Now he considers everything as refuse or rubbish and wants only Christ. In the Gospel Jesus challenges the woman to personal transformation, "Go and sin no more." Will we be different after Lent? Will we have overcome sin in our lives? Will we be spending more time in spiritual reading or reading Sacred Scripture, in prayer and reflection? Will we be wasting less time with the TV, computers or other things and spending the time saved with the Lord. What is happening to us this Lent that will last beyond Lent for the rest of the year?

Fr Robert Newton