

Journey from Darkness to Light.

Exodus 14:10—15:1 Midweek Lent III

“The Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand towards heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt”. Exodus 10:21

We don't know the full depths of darkness. Night in the city always has a little light. And even in the unpopulated desert wastelands there is the light from the moon and the stars. Even in the most adverse conditions, a man might strike flint to break the darkness. You must travel to an otherworldly and unexplored country to find true darkness. It is a land of darkness we only know by revelation given by the Law, the Prophets and our Lord Jesus Christ. Still, we also have an innate knowledge of it and long to be delivered from it and even the threat of it. But how? Everyone longs for an answer to the dark mysteries in something pure and holy and yet they never find it. They chase after fables and legends and fantasy and are left empty. So that is why the Harry Potter saga and his imitators are so wildly successful. Yet it is but an illusion and sad parody. Yet this evening I tell you a mystery! The joy is that this mystery is rooted in history fulfilled in the man who rose from the dead and made real by the Spirit. It speaks to the cravings of the soul, yes even those modern souls, yes even your immortal soul.

Now concerning the reality of such darkness, Jesus speaks of such a place saying of the man caught unawares without his wedding garment that “He shall be cast into the outer darkness”(Matthew 22:15). The threat and its cure in being cloaked in baptism are contained in the same passage. There have only been a few times in the history of the world when this “outer darkness” has entered our realm so that the many would experience it. Likewise the cure in baptism is also alluded to. The first we think of is from the Exodus plagues and the second is from the darkness which descended upon the earth at the death of Christ. In the exodus story there is salvation first through the blood of the Lamb and then through the waters of the Red Sea. In the crucifixion scene there is salvation through blood and water flowing through His Riven Side. Both the water and the blood are integral to Christian baptism.

We think first of the Exodus from Egypt. Of all the fantastic details which the Jews could have preserved concerning their life and deliverance from Egypt they retained the details concerning the plagues including the plague of the darkness which could be felt. It's a darkness going beyond the physical absence of light. Egypt is darkness because Egypt is sin. The darkness of sin is the ultimate cause of Egypt's ruin and destruction.

The Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand towards heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, *a darkness to be felt*”. Exodus 10:21

The world through media such as TV may not be able to speak accurately about all things good like Heaven or the Gospel, but it sure can speak and accurately portray things evil. Darkness that can be felt is like when Harry Potter goes into a tunnel and what was moments ago a scorcher of a summer day with temperatures in the mid 90's F is now stone cold, so cold that you can see your breath. That's a darkness which may be felt. And then the demeters came. In the case of the Egyptians, then the angel of death prepared to descend.

We secondly think of evil having its way with the Christ. Jesus dies on the cross. Darkness descends upon the earth from the 6th to the 9th hour. This also is a “supernatural darkness” which no eclipse or other natural phenomena can explain away. It is an eerie darkness at the height of day.

We share in the collective consciousness of a people afflicted at one time or other by the *darkness to be felt*. Just this morning I was listening to the radio about the increasing numbers of people who are religiously unaffiliated. They survive in the increasingly technological and scheduled society where there are enough distractions to keep them focused away from eternal issues and ultimate questions. But when the Tsunami hits and life turns back to basic issues of air, water, clothing, shelter and food we don't have our technology to distract us anymore. Sitting in a darkened church on a Wednesday evening, even for a moment, we become in tune with ultimate realities. Sitting in a darkened church on the night of the Easter Vigil you prepare to travel from the darkness which can be felt, to the Light of the World who gladdens our heart and becomes the centre of our eternity in heaven. Those longing for the Light of the World find him in Baptism even as the baptismal candle is lit we hear the Pastor say, "Receive this burning light to show that you have received Christ who is the Light of the World". Lit from the Paschal Candle we know it is ancient mysterious cure to combat an equally ancient darkness.

Innately your conscience cries out against the sin that must be struggled against. We know the named identified and defeated. He is not "Voldemort" but Satan and his legions which must be defeated.

It requires a champion who exists from all eternity. He enters into the battle wherever the darkness comes which "can be felt". The power over darkness comes with the shedding of blood then applied to water, which is then applied to our souls. This is Baptism.

And the power in the mystery of baptism was long foretold even in this central story of the Old Testament of the children of Israel being liberated from Egypt first by the blood of the lamb applied to their doorposts and then, through the waters of the Red Sea. And at the centre of the Blood and the Water is the Christ. Who was promised to the Israelites as they saw the Egyptians marching after them? God spoke, "the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent".

Isn't that the ultimate word on our deliverance? We can contribute nothing. We stand silent, waiting on the promises of God.

"Then the Angel of God went before the host of Israel".

"There was the cloud and the darkness" is what our text says. And the cloud lit up the night keeping the darkness and the Egyptians in it till day.

And the Lord in the pillar of fire and of cloud looked down on the Egyptian forces and put them into a panic till their chariot wheels were stuck in the mud and then when the Israelites safely crossed the Red Sea the waters covered of the Egyptians and drowned the source of all darkness.

The connection between Israel's deliverance from darkness of Egypt through blood and water is made again and again to our Baptism in our liturgies and prayers.

On the evening of the Easter Vigil, the large Paschal candle makes its first appearance for the Easter season symbolizing the pillar of fire which led the children of Israel to the Promised Land and we follow as dear children. Rev. Kim will sing the Easter Proclamation and make the connection between Passover and Easter chanting:

This is the night when You brought our fathers,
The children of Israel, out of bondage in Egypt
And led them through the Red Sea on dry ground.
This is the night when all who believe in Christ are delivered from bondage to sin

And are restored to life and immortality.
This is the night when Christ, the Life, arose from the dead.

Later in the service we make the connection between the Passover, the Resurrection of Christ and our Baptism.

At every Baptism whenever it is celebrated, out comes the Paschal Candle to remind us of that connection. At every Christian Funeral, out comes the Paschal Candle to remind us that the one who has died, has rather, made a journey from darkness into the light.

We shall reach the Promised Land. Despite many doubts and delays the children of Israel reached the Promised Land. How silly many must have felt for their immaturity now as they stand on the other side of Jordan. Likewise how shall we feel! And even more so. For how much more has our God proven himself a Deliverer since that time. Through many prophets and Kings he has preserved the nation. He has, as Samuel prophesized, never failed to have a King sit from the house of David. Jesus came through the gates of Jerusalem amid the cries of "Son of David have mercy upon us". He died upon the cross under Pilate's banner of "King of the Jews". Up from the grave he comes triumphantly as King of kings and Lord of Lords. In baptism he likewise raises us from from dark waters of death to live new lives.

At the Easter Vigil we follow the light of the world in a real way to a New World of the Promised Land where Jesus is at the centre where the Lamb Himself gives us Light.

May we therefore rejoice in making this Lenten Journey from the darkness of sin and death to the illumination of the Christ. Behold the meaning of your baptism is often referred to as illumination in Greek and the baptized as the illuminated. May our light so shine before men this night.

Amen.