

Lent IV, 2018 – Resurrection, Ansonia

+May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

An “*Exodus*” is a *going forth*. The book of Exodus tells the story of the going forth of the Hebrews from the land of Egypt. The Exodus is the going forth from slavery into the freedom of God’s people. God is their liberator. God is the condition of their freedom.

Their understanding of freedom had to be learned by the Hebrews. In the wilderness, they learn what it means to be God’s people. In the wilderness, they learn the law as revealed by God unto Moses. The people of God are the people of the law. The law defines them. The study and understanding of the Law is still central to Jewish lives and the Talmud is a collection of interpretations of the Law by the great Hebrew scholars Hillel, Gamaliel, and others.

Just as God’s word defines the Law for His people, so also God’s word defines His will for his people. The God who has freed them from oppression in Egypt gives his will for them in the law. The Ten Commandments is the law in its completeness. It recalls the theme of liberation at the very beginning: “*And God spake all these words saying I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*” (Ex.20:1-3).

But this freedom from oppression signals something more. There is a greater freedom - a freedom for God's people. They are freed to God. The law is his will for his people. It establishes a relationship. The God who has freed his people from slavery has freed them to himself. He is with them in the covenant of his will for them.

The going forth is not easy. The way of Exodus is hard. It is a wilderness journey in which all the comforts, the conveniences and the old complacencies are not there. But the hardness of the way is as nothing compared to the hardness of our hearts along the way. Exodus chronicles something of the hardness of our hearts which resist the liberating spirit of God's Word. Yet the Exodus is God's doing. God brings his people out. Their going forth is his doing. He sustains them in the way. He provides for them. There is the strengthening presence of God. There is refreshment.

It is not just that there are the occasional oases in the desert. No. The refreshment in the Exodus story is something deeper. It is the presence of God in his written will for his people. That is to be the constant measure of their lives, a continual source of refreshment. The law is a delight. It teaches us our freedom. Our freedom is to be found in the will of God for us.

There is a greater Exodus however. It is the Exodus of God for his people. God goes forth to accomplish our greater liberation. It is not only taught but accomplished. It remains to be willed and lived. The greater Exodus is the going forth of the Son into the wilderness of our sin and death to accomplish our liberation to the will of the Father. The greater Exodus is the Passion of Jesus Christ. *"I have come to do the will of him who sent me"* - the Father's will for

us. It is written in the blood of Christ. We have to learn what he has accomplished for us.

Our freedom is to will what he has done for us. The condition of our freedom is Christ in us. St. Paul states the condition of our freedom: *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Gal.2.20.). Thus, it is a freedom that exists in us. As Ignatius of Antioch stated it, *“Another lives in me.”*

St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians is his great manifesto of Christian liberation. He reminds us that *“Jerusalem which is above is free; which is the mother of us all”*. The Jerusalem of which he speaks is above, yet present. He is not speaking of a political or a future state - a utopian ideal - but a present spiritual condition or state of grace. We are the children of promise, the promise fulfilled in Christ Jesus. The freedom is inward and spiritual. The children of freedom are the children of Sarah not Hagar. The great preacher of the Oxford Movement, John Keble, explains St. Paul’s message to the Galatians as follows:

*“Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid and the other by a freewoman, the Law of God at that time allowing, as you know, of more than one wife. Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman Hagar, was born in a natural way, without any thing strange or miraculous. After him was born Isaac, the son of the freewoman Sarah, in a wonderful manner, by miracle; his father being a hundred years old, and his mother past age: and this in fulfilment of a special covenant which God had made with Abraham a great many years before, during all which time he had been waiting for it in faith. This difference between the two sons the Apostle explains by saying, “Ishmael, the son of the bondwoman, was born after the flesh, but Isaac*

*the son of the freewoman was by promise.” And then he goes on to explain that this whole matter was an allegory or parable. Abraham represents Almighty God, the Father of us all; Ishmael represents mankind in general, who are the children of God born after the natural way; Isaac represents the Christian people, God’s children by adoption and grace; God’s children, because by a heavenly and spiritual union they are made members of His Only Begotten Son; born again of God, born of water and of the Spirit. The elder son is in bondage, because until people are mystically united to Jesus Christ they are in slavery under sin, death, and the devil; they are not free to obey God’s holy commandments; even if they have misgivings, and some sense of what is right, they must confess as one did of old, “The good that I would, I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do.” But the younger son Isaac, is free, because the children of Christ and of His Church have power given them by His Holy Spirit to keep His commandments if they will.”*

The freedom is the release from the oppression of sin. It is a release to God and it is a release in the soul. It puts us in the spiritual place of freedom. That is the “*Jerusalem which is above...which is the mother of us all*”. That Jerusalem is present now for us in Mother Church. She is the place of our life with Christ, here and now, where we live by faith not by works, by what is inwardly and spiritually achieved for us being inwardly and spiritually realized in us.

That mother would sustain us in the wilderness pilgrimage of faith. She would sustain us by the grace of Christ. It is more than words of encouragement. It is the reality of Jerusalem in our midst. It is always more than we need. “*Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost...and they filled twelve baskets*” – twelve baskets that signify Christ’s sacramental provision for his apostolic Church. We live graciously from those fragments of the heavenly banquet

provided for us by the sacrifice of Christ in the greater wilderness of our sin and death. At a time when our church is sadly fractured and broken, we need specially to remember the provisions Christ makes for us even in our brokenness, even in the brokenness of our communion. We live from Jerusalem but only in and through the passion of Christ. He is our freedom and it is *“for freedom”* that he *“has set us free”*. Our freedom is only in him and he in us. *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”*

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.