

Easter Sunday 2020
Exodus 15:1-4
"He has Triumphed Gloriously"

THEN MOSES AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL SANG THIS SONG TO THE LORD, SAYING, "I WILL SING TO THE LORD, FOR HE HAS TRIUMPHED GLORIOUSLY; THE HORSE AND HIS RIDER HE HAS THROWN INTO THE SEA. THE LORD IS MY STRENGTH AND MY SONG, AND HE HAS BECOME MY SALVATION; THIS IS MY GOD, AND I WILL PRAISE HIM, MY FATHER'S GOD, AND WILL EXALT HIM (Ex 15:1-4)."

The greatest celebrations of joy are often preceded by the greatest moments of despair. What I mean is: what is the joy of Easter without the sadness of Good Friday? What is the hope of the resurrection without the fear of death? And what is the liberty of forgiveness and new life in Christ without the bondage of guilt and shame for our sins? The celebration of the resurrection of our Lord has no depth of meaning, nor any intensity of emotion, if we do not see the terrible predicament both Jesus, and we ourselves, were in before this festive day. Jesus was nailed to a cross and we were nailed to our obligation to wages of our sin, death.

You can never appreciate the mountain tops until you climb through the valleys. You cannot celebrate the light of dawn until you have seen the darkness of night; so you cannot rejoice in the Gospel until you have been terrified by the Law. But when someone does come through this journey from darkness to light, a song springs from their soul that will rejoice, give thanks and sing praises to God!

A case in point is the song Moses sings on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. The reason this praise of God is so passionate is that Israel was singing quite a different song on the opposite side of the sea. They were in an awful predicament on the western side of the sea, and, in a moment of

weakness, they lost faith in the one true God. But the Lord rescued them. He delivered them from the brink of disaster, and now their voices become vessels of joy.

The church has always seen the connection between the song of Moses and the celebration of Easter. As Moses brought the children of Israel through the Red Sea to their song of deliverance, so Christ has brought us from the bondage of sin and death to sing the song of our salvation. There is great contrast between the western side of the Sea and the eastern side of the Sea. The greatest celebrations of joy often are preceded by the greatest moments of despair.

Let me take you to the western shore of the sea. Let me take to Israel's great moment of despair. There, Israel came face-to-face with a crisis of faith. Death was imminent. Moments before, the future looked bright. The Lord had heard their cry! They had been set free! The Lord had delivered them from the tyranny of Pharaoh!

But then, they heard the rumble of chariots in the distance. Pharaoh was coming and with a vengeance. He was coming to exact a payment in blood for the blood of the firstborn the angel of death had slain. He was coming to crush this Israeli rebellion. It would be easy to say the children of Israel were between a rock and a hard place. The nearly 3-million people Moses had brought out of Egypt stood with the waters of the Red Sea before them and the armies of a furious Pharaoh behind them.

The people were overcome with fear which soon turned to anger. They cried to Moses,

“Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been

better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness (Ex 14:11-12).”

But Moses replied,

“Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again. The Lord will fight for you (Ex 14:13-14a).”

That night, the Lord God drove the sea back with a strong wind and turned it into dry ground. The waters were divided, and Israel went through the sea with unmoistened feet, with a wall of water on their right and one on their left. Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them through the wall of water, but the Lord God brought the sea back to its place, so that “not of them remained (Ex 14:28).”

With their own eyes, the children of Israel saw the deliverance of the Lord. From their despair, they had been redeemed from the point of no return and they break into exuberant song:

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will raise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Today is a day for singing songs of victory. Easter is a day for gathering on the **eastern** shore of the sea to celebrate the victory God has given us. We celebrate our exodus from the land of slavery to sin and death. We worship the mighty warrior, Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who though He was dead has come to life again, and brought life and immortality to light (cf. 1 Tm 1:10). Because He lives, we too shall live (cf. Jn 14:19)!

But I wonder ... Do we sing songs of praise to our God like people who have been brought from slavery to freedom? Do we sing on the eastern

side of the Sea like people who have been on the western side of the Sea, with no hope and no way out?

The fear for Israel was very real with Pharaoh's army behind her and the Red Sea waters before her, with no way of escape before the Lord came to her rescue. Maybe, that is what is missing in our worship. In the folly of our sinful thinking, we still think there is a way out, or maybe we have yet to hear the chariots rumbling in the distance to awaken us to our hopeless situation.

The fear that filled the hearts of Israelites that day is the fear that should confront all of us. Oh, we would like to think that we would be braver than they. We say with stoic pride, "I'm not afraid to die." Yet, no matter how brave the face we put on, we remember that after death comes the judgment.

The Scriptures declare: "It is appointed for man to die once and after that to face judgment." (Heb 9:26). And the standard by which God will judge the world is his own perfection...His own holiness. After all, that is the way God created us – in His own image, without sin. "God made man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he made them," the Bible says (Ge 1:27). He gave us His holy law that we might keep his commandments. But the law instead has become a mirror to show us our faults and failings. Do we love as God loves? Do we love our neighbor as ourselves? Or do we always find ourselves getting in the way of this perfect love? We have our own desires and thoughts; and our desires and thoughts are not the Lord's.

Like the children of Israel, we too have our backs up against the wall. Sin and death blocked our way to the Promised Land. Because we sin, we will die, and after death comes the judgment. But Christ has taken our

place. He became a real man, born of human mother, and took on our sins and death for us and our salvation. He is the mighty champion who faced our condemnation and destroyed the power of sin and death.

Before the deliverance of God, there was no way of escape. The judgment of God was destined to roll over us, like the rumbling of the Egyptian chariots. We were to be delivered over to death which would eternally separate us from the presence of God. But Christ our Savior bore our sin and took upon Himself our judgment, and was delivered over to that horrible death we justly deserved. Then He rose again triumphant! He overcame death and the grave! Baptized and living in Him, His victory is now our victory!

And so it is written, "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Co 15:55-57)."

Is our God not great? Has He not triumphed gloriously? Is not our salvation something to sing and shout about? Is not the redemption that is ours through faith in Jesus Christ something to celebrate? As the psalmist has said, "I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation." (Ps 118:13-14)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.