

Lent 3            3/8/26  
Exodus 17:1-7 A

AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THE PLACE MASSAH AND MERIBAH, BECAUSE OF THE QUARELLING OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL, AND BECAUSE THEY TESTED THE LORD SAYING, "IS THE LORD AMONG US OR NOT?"

Testing and Quarreling. That's what Moses named the place. And, you say, "What? No, he didn't, Pastor. He called the name of the place Massah and Meribah." Yes, that's the way our lesson reads. But in English, "Massah" means "testing," and "Meribah" means "quarreling". Moses gave the place these names because the people were testing God and were really quarreling with God by quarreling with His prophet Moses .

The Israelites were testing and quarreling with God because they failed to trust in the Lord after He had redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt. What happened was this. Under Pharaoh in Egypt, the children of Israel were oppressed and afflicted. They were weighed down with heavy burdens. Their male infants were taken away from them and murdered. They cried out to God for delivery and He heard their plea for help. They saw the plagues that the LORD sent upon the Egyptians. The angel of death "passed over" them when all the firstborn of the land were struck down. God took them out of Egypt with a mighty hand. They saw Pharaoh and his army drowned in the Red Sea. They were rescued, they walked on dry land, and they rejoiced in their salvation.

From the Red Sea they went into the wilderness and after three days they found no water. They came to Marah and found some water that was bitter. They grumbled and complained to Moses. Moses prayed to the LORD and the LORD showed him a log and he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. Then they traveled to Elim where there were

twelve springs with water. They left Elim and came to the wilderness of Sin. Again, they complained and grumbled to Moses because they were hungry. Moses prayed to the LORD and God gave them manna, the bread from heaven, and quail to eat. Then they moved on to Rephidim and again they found no water, became thirsty, and complained and grumbled to Moses because our lesson says, *there was no water for the people to drink. Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink" (vs. 1-2).* Moses prayed to God, and the LORD told him to strike a rock with his staff and water gushed out of it. This was the place called Massah and Meribah. Testing and Quarreling. This is the place where they said, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

When things are going well, we rejoice and say God has blessed us richly. But, as soon as things get bitter, sour, or trying, we are quick to question and say, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

Our baptism has marked us as one redeemed by Christ the crucified. Jesus has promised that He is with us always. You have God's own promise that He works good in all things for you. And yet, in the hour of trial, your feelings and emotions will make you ask, "Is the LORD among us or not?" Illness and infirmity strike our earthly bodies. You brought your child to the font of baptism and heard their confession that they would suffer all even death rather than fall away from Jesus and His Church. But now, you cannot even recall the last time they darkened the church door. You find yourself in a marriage where Satan has convinced your spouse that when God proclaimed you husband and wife, He made a mistake. Your parents are aging, which means they are not as independent as they once were, and your advice is not always welcome. Your job, with its nice

salary and benefits, now seems more like a grind, a daily grind, than making life sweet. Is God with us or not?

The Lord wants us to be certain so that we don't question like the Israelites who were brought out of Egypt saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?" We know that God is among us in Jesus Christ. We cling to the name given to Jesus by the angel Gabriel who declared to Joseph, "*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel*" (which means, *God with us*) (Mt 1:23). Jesus is with us as He has promised at the end of the Gospel according to St. Matthew, "*And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Mt 28:20). God's promise to us is not that we will have a life of ease free from adversity. Instead, He assures us that when we have sufferings and trials, He strengthens and teaches us to rejoice in them. Our Epistle lesson puts it this way,

More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Ro 5:3-5).

The Holy Spirit uses this word of comfort to comfort us in our lives. He opens our eyes to see how much the Lord truly loves us. He assures us by saying, *God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Ro 5:8). God has not forsaken us. It was Jesus who suffered for us and it was Jesus who cried out to the Father, "*My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?*" He was abandoned by God the Father in our behalf so that we would never be abandoned by God and we can be certain that cross of Jesus has satisfied the Father's wrath against our sin.

In the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, Paul teaches us that such passages as today's Old Testament text were written so that we do not lose hope, lack faith, complain, and grumble like the Israelites of old. They saw the wonders and miracles that the LORD had done, but yet they questioned if He was for them or against them. They set their eyes on their own bellies and took their eyes off of the heavenly prize. They soon forgot how horrible the slavery to Pharaoh really was. They began to glorify those days saying, "Back under Pharaoh, things were much better. There was plenty to eat and plenty to drink." And most of those Israelites who passed through the Red Sea waters did not reach the Promised Land.

Hearing the words of our lesson, we are forced to take a look at our heart, our lives, our faith. Are we putting God to the test by doubting that He is with us? Are we doubting that God cares for us? Have we taken our eyes off of Jesus to put our faith, love, and trust in the things we see with our physical eyes?

Seeing our testing of God and our quarreling of His ways, we plead as did the father whose son had an unclean spirit, "*I believe; help my unbelief*" (Mk 9:24). As God was with the Israelites in the cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, God is with us Jesus Christ to forgive and increase our faith.

As Moses struck the rock and water gushed out, Jesus was pierced for us and the water flowed out that springs up within us to everlasting life. As Moses gave bread from heaven, Jesus is the Bread from Heaven that gave up His flesh for the life of the world. As Moses put the wood log in the bitter water to make the water sweet, the wood cross of Jesus makes the bitterness of our lives sweet. Jesus assures us in John's Gospel, "*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world*

*you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (Jn 16:33).* Jesus has overcome the world so we know that in Him we are more than conquerors. JESUS IS OUR BELOVED IMMANUEL. HE IS GOD WITH US.

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