

Easter Vigil, 2013

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The entire history of God's people carries the theme of freedom. Freedom was always an important concept and experience, from the beginning of creation, because humankind, when confronted with an attractive alternative to God, freely chose that alternative. An attraction outside of God captured us, and we became its slave. This initial act of rebellion was the first in a long history of choices to separate from God, and we are part of that history.

Rebellion against God results in a slavery to the only alternative to the all-good God, which is evil. The history of the people of God is a struggle against this servitude, this attachment to self, rather than the obedience that is submission to God. The story of the people of God is also the story of each of our individual lives.

Revelation in the Bible shows that the spiritual and moral development of humanity was gradual, a growing process from slavery to freedom, that brought the people from their primitive beginnings, over centuries of growth and prophecy, into the maturity to recognize Christ when at last he came. In Christ the way to God was made clear. It is the way of submission, of obedience, of freedom, to offset the self-destructive alternatives of stubborn disobedience and slavery to sin.

Christ had to submit, to obey, because it was the only way to carry out the Father's plan to bring back his children to his heart, from their chosen places apart. Jesus was sent to free us from ourselves. He not only paved the way to God by example. He is the way to God, so that our success in reaching the Father has to be in Christ, incorporated into his Body, his Church. God is always calling us back, because we are always in some way apart from him, apart from one another, apart from ourselves.

In the Church, the Body of Christ, we can always come back to God. In the Church the facts of God's dealing with us are repeated and celebrated. He asks for our sorrow for sin, and in return promises us his forgiveness and

mercy. The Church is the new creation of God's people, headed by Christ, the new Adam, who was the old head of the human race. Incorporated under Adam we are servants, slaves of self; incorporated under Christ we are servants of God in freedom.

From a scientific point of view, it has been calculated that it would have taken weeks for the some 600,000 people of God, including slow-moving women and children, to pass through the sea, but this is no reason to discount the historical presentation. God, the creator of time and space, was in charge of His people, and what is impossible in the natural order according to us, is not a problem for the supernatural Lord. We can remember this when we approach God in prayer, with the greatest confidence in his almighty power.

The Lord relies on other comparisons in his self-revelation to us. He plants life on his earth, gives us plants for our good, to produce and sustain life, and plants that provide medicines to heal life. We are God's most important plantings on earth, and we have the same capabilities and obligations to produce life, nourish life, and heal life, providing freedom from death.

The popular saying is true, that freedom is not free. Freedom must be defended, and it is true in the spiritual realm as well. Strength of character is necessary to fight off the assaults of evil thoughts and acts. At the same time, with God, freedom is free. The Lord acts toward us on the basis of his overpowering love, not on the basis of our infidelities. God makes his decisions from who he is, not who we are. The point is that the Lord gives no one power over him to compromise his love for us, and it is this Spirit that he wants to put in us, his Holy Spirit of self-determined love, not love earned by someone else.

We have been baptized into Christ, baptized into his death to sin, and raised to new life and freedom in God. That new life is given to us not as a theoretical concept, only to be celebrated at this time each year, and on Sundays. We have a new life to live, the life of God, and he impels us to announce to the world that Christ has risen from the dead, that his all-powerful life has conquered slavery to sin and death, for all of us.

The revelations of God's love to us come by way of offerings, to be accepted or rejected, and human history is filled with rejections of God right from the very beginning. We are taking our turn now, to choose the eternal life of the risen Christ or to limit ourselves to our own lives which are passing away.

All of God's interventions in human history have led up to this point in time. The Biblical figures had their moments in time, and now the stage is set for our performance. We must answer the basic question of everyone's life: will you choose God or not? We pray for the wisdom and faith to rise above ourselves and take hold of the new life of God, won for us by the suffering and risen Christ.

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