

Year of Bible Series
Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ (St Jerome)
The First Five Books of the Bible (The Pentateuch)

Dear Holy People of God,

Grace and Peace to you in Christ Jesus Our Lord. May the Lord's goodness continue to sustain you day by day, during these difficult times of COVID 19. I am writing to you in relation to our Year of Bible, which we inaugurated as a parish family on December 24th 2019. Our first two sessions were well attended and provided the opportunity for us to delve deeper into the Book of Genesis and the Synoptic Gospels (that is, Matthew, Mark and Luke). My hope and prayer are that we continue to read the Bible, though we are unable to meet and discuss the books. Always feel free to send me questions as you read, if you have any.

To recall, Genesis tells us that God is the Creator of the world; secondly, that the human being, male and female, made in the image and likeness of God, is the peak of creation. Human dignity and greatness reside in being created in God's image. And that's why we are pro-life, respecting life from the moment of conception to its natural end. However, as lofty as this vision is, Genesis also tells us that we were "taken from dust," that is, we are fallen creatures, wounded by original sin which has brought about a spirit of rebellion against God, on the part of human beings. As a consequence of original sin, the relationship between God and human beings is now marked with suspicion and disobedience. The relationship between man and woman, humans themselves, is fraught with tension, distrust, violence and mutual hostility. Even the relationship between human beings and nature is fractured. God's good earth is no longer a garden to be cared for by humans. Rather, the earth is approached from the perspective of exploitation and domination. But even this dark scenario has a silver lining: God already promises a Messiah, who will crush the serpent's head. And the story of the coming of the Messiah begins with the call of Abraham and Israel. This is a story that God himself has created, and Genesis and the entire Bible is a telling of that story.

The next four books, taken together with the book of Genesis, constitute what is called the Pentateuch, that is, the first five books of the Bible: **Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy**. With the Book of Exodus, two significant events stand out: Firstly, there is the revelation of the Sacred Name to Moses, an encounter that sends Moses back to Egypt to begin the journey of the liberation of Israel. God gives Moses the Name: "**I Am Who I Am** (Exodus 3)" God is being. God is the verb "to be." God is not the God of the past. He is present. He will be with Israel throughout the journey of liberation. With the revelation of the Sacred Name, two things stand out: God has come close to us such that we can invoke God and call upon God; and secondly, God is not tied down to any particular location. He is a personal God who is with us everywhere. Above all, the Sacred Name is a pointer to Jesus who will describe himself as "I Am," in the Gospel of John.

The second significant event in the Book of Exodus is of course, the Crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14). Following St Paul, Christian tradition has understood this event as pointing to the Sacrament of Baptism, the Sacrament that delivers us from the bondage of sin into the new life in Christ. St Gregory of Nyssa in his *Life of Moses*, writes that Egypt is the symbol of the old life of sin, the ungodly life. Hence, the crossing of the Red Sea is the leaving behind of the old

life of this world. And this is what Baptism does: It brings us out of the Egypt of sin into the promised land of God's grace and reign, where righteousness shall flow like a river. Therefore, when we read about the crossing of the Red Sea, it leaves us with the question: What have I done with my Baptism? (To be continued, Fr Maurice).