

Today we hear of the Exodus of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt and the request for a sign from Jesus. The two readings have a lot in common. There is a natural human tendency to complain and to resist change:

- Pharaoh and his servants no sooner make a monumental decision to let the slaves go free and then they change their minds. “What have we done?” (Ex 14:5)
- And the children of Israel complained to Moses: “Were there no burial places in Egypt that you had to bring us out here to die in the desert? ... Leave us alone. Let us serve the Egyptians?” (Ex 14:11,12)
- In the Gospel, Jesus notes how unwilling this generation is to repent and to listen to his teaching.

In stark contrast, Moses tells the people: “Stand your ground, and you will see the victory the LORD will win for you today...The LORD himself will fight for you; you have only to keep still” (Ex 14:13,14). Jesus will stand his ground on Calvary when he fights for us offering his life in sacrifice.

When God instructs Moses to part the Red Sea, the chosen people will escape from slavery. The Egyptians, resistant to let go, will follow the instructions of Pharaoh that lead to death. In the Gospel, Jesus speaks of a sign greater than Jonah. “Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights” (Mt 12:40). Jesus is aware that even this sign, his resurrection from the dead, will be resisted.

The natural question is: are we any better than the Israelites? Do we trust in the Lord to deliver us from evil? Each time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we say “Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.” The Catechism puts this in context: “God wants to set us free from evil; he tempts no one (cf. CCC, no. 2846). When we say “lead us not into temptation” we are asking God not to allow us to take the path that leads to sin (Adult Catechism P. 451). As we avoid the near occasion of sin, we build strength in virtue.

The second natural question: are we any better than the generations that Jesus and Matthew addressed? We not only have the resurrection as a sign, but we also have the sacraments. “Holy Communion is the effective sign of Christ’s Paschal Mystery, it becomes for the recipient the opportunity to unite one’s own suffering and dying to that of Christ with the hope of life eternal with him” (Catechism for Adults p. 246). The question now becomes: are we willing to unite our suffering with the cross of Christ? God offers us an opportunity to bring about good as we unite our suffering with his Paschal Mystery.

Every generation complains and resists ... struggling with faith. However, God invites us to be witnesses so that our faithful example may be a sign for this generation.