

The Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 20, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #23)

“Sometimes it’s easier to be a lemming than a leader.” (Scott Hahn, A Father Who Keeps His Promises, p. 152)

In our continued study of God’s covenant with mankind, we next move to the great signs and wonders God performed in the land of Egypt. These events, retold in the Book of Exodus, have provided many generations of scholars and religious-minded folk with ample opportunities for research and spiritual development. For our part, let us walk with the children of Israel from their forced labor in Egypt, through the waters of the Red Sea, unto the foot of Mount Sinai. For here at the base of Sinai, I believe we will find out just how much we have in common with our spiritual ancestors.

In the past, I often found myself questioning the “scientific possibility” of The Plagues God inflicted upon Pharaoh and all of the land of Egypt. Could these events, detailed in The Book of Exodus, have occurred as a result of a natural disaster? Or, were they truly events of Divine Intervention where God altered nature through the hand of Moses? By focusing solely upon this line of scientific analysis, I confess, I failed to grasp the significance of the spiritual meanings which were attributed to the Plagues. God was not only showing His power to both Egypt and Israel; He was also pronouncing a judgment upon the many “gods” which were worshipped in Egypt, and had begun to influence Israel. Guided by the scholarship of Dr. Scott Hahn, allow me to present two examples which may serve to better illustrate this idea of Divine Judgment. The Nile River was understood to be both sacred to Egypt and fundamental to the nation’s livelihood. The god *Hapi* was worshipped as protector and defender of the Nile. When the water of the Nile changed into blood, could that mean God had passed judgment upon *Hapi* and slew him? The same could also be said of the plague of frogs. The Egyptian goddess *Heket* was often worshipped under the appearance of a frog. When they died, could this as well be understood as she too had been judged and slain by God? Whether these events were of natural or divine origin, the point was made that God was the only God and His children should reconsider their allegiance to these other gods of mankind’s own making.

In light of these monumental events, do the children of Israel listen and devote themselves to God? Before we answer this question, let us ask ourselves: “Do we listen?” I would surmise the answer for both parties would be a resounding “No”. No, we are no different from the children of Israel who experienced the plagues, witnessed the dividing of the water of the Red Sea, and now bow trembling at the base of Mount Sinai. We too make the same demands of God as they once did. For as they stood there looking at Mount Sinai, wreathed in clouds, shaking from the violent peels of thunder, and mesmerized by the flashing of lightning, they begged Moses: “You go ahead, we will stay behind and do whatever God asks of us.

The point I would like to reinforce this weekend is twofold. Despite God’s faithfulness toward the covenant with humanity, we continue to fail on our end. Like bored children in the backseat of the family car on vacation, both Israel and we complain about the difficulty of the journey. They wished to return to their lives of forced labor for, despite the work, they had full bellies. Now hungry, thirsty, and tired from the walking, the signs they witnessed and the freedom they possessed, meant little. In a nutshell, their religious attitude now resembled a passive/aggressive child: “I will accept You, God, only as long as I choose and are rewarded for my choices!”

As I reflect and write this homily, I have come to realize that so often we too hold this same attitude in dealing with God. Despite His continued faithfulness to us, His covenantal love for us, and His most generous hand of blessing turned favorably toward us, we soon forget these and choose to acknowledge Him only after He has answered our latest demand. “God, You do X, and then I will do Y” has become the prayerful refrain of many Christians. My dear people, He sacrificed His only Son for you and I, what demands are we now allowed to make of Him?