

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord
March 24, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #13

“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and said to them, ‘Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots, and ate bread to the full; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.’”

(Exodus 16:2-3)

“But the people thirsted there for water, and the people murmured against Moses, and said, ‘Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?’”

(Exodus 17:3)

I begin this reflection with an obvious statement – Life in the desert can be very harsh. The severity of their situation, lack of food and water, leads Israel to grumble against God through their leaders, Moses and Aaron. The Book of Exodus records these struggles as a means to contrast God and His people. Even though the people experience God’s continual presence, with each new struggle, they complain. These complaints highlight their lack of faith in God’s ability to alleviate their misery. Furthermore, they bring into focus Israel’s lack of hope that God will be faithful to His Word. Time and again, God will alleviate the sufferings of His people even though, one may argue, they do not deserve His beneficence.

Biblical scholars have offered theories, papers and books concerning the means God used to reduce Israel’s suffering. Manna, they suggest, may be the secretion from the tamarisk shrub or tree. Quails will cross the Sinai Peninsula during their migrations from Africa to either Europe or Asia. These birds may be trapped as they rest on their journey. Desert caravans would encamp near wells or natural springs. Their shortages of water would occur as they traveled between various oases. The sacred writer may not have been aware of the naturally occurring phenomenon as he authored these stories. Whether these events are of natural or supernatural origin, the writer is not concerned. What is fundamental is – God is faithful.

One may wonder why I focus on these two events and how God chooses to respond. I do so for this reason. Even with their hunger and thirst satisfied, the people will still complain. The food and drink become bland. They desire something more, different or maybe exciting. Now, transpose those same feelings upon Catholics today. How many view Catholicism as routine? A rote performance requiring their weekly attendance. Still more, may see their Catholicism as only needing to be practiced occasionally or at those special moments in life, such as baptisms, marriages and funerals. Similar to Israel in the desert, the food being offered is viewed as mundane. By food, I stress, the Word of God in the Bible proclaimed and the Body of Jesus

present in the Eucharist. Sadly, we, the new Israel wandering in this desert, desire greater entertainment coupled with a lively TED (technology, entertainment and design) talk.

Next week, I want to circle back to the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh in Egypt. God instructs Moses to convey a specific message to Pharaoh. He demands Pharaoh release His children. They are to be free; not solely for freedom's sake. Rather, free to go and sacrifice to Him. Literally, God wants to teach His children how to properly worship and adore Him. Please, let us reflect upon that for next week. God is going to reveal to Israel how they are to worship and adore Him.