

FROM BONDAGE TO THE PERFECT FREEDOM OF HIS SERVICE

(based on an address given by the Rev. Fr. Doug Hayman to the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Deanery - October 22nd, 2005)

I'd like to begin by talking about two bodies of water: the Red Sea and the Jordan River. Now, it's not so much the bodies in themselves, but what happened at those bodies that I would like to consider - i.e. what it meant to pass through the waters, particularly when we think about, on the one hand, Israel and the Exodus, crossing over-literally "through" - the Red Sea; and, on the other, John's baptism as it is transformed by Jesus coming to those waters; and how both of them speak to our baptism as we move from bondage to the perfect freedom of His service. Further, I want to reflect upon the importance of moving from being set free - literally, technically, physically set free from bondage - and actually coming to live as free people.

Let's go back, then, to the Exodus and think about that. Let's stand, as it were, on the far side of the Red Sea with the people of Israel as they gaze back over the waters, now flowing so freely over very the place where short hours before they had crossed over on dry ground. They gaze back in astonishment at this miracle of God. They had come to the banks of the Red Sea and there was no way forward - no way ahead - and yet beyond any hope, beyond anything that they might have expected or imagined of themselves, God opened a way through the waters. But there was more than that. They had come to those waters pursued by the Egyptian army and now those waters, flowing back over their pathway, likewise coursed over the Egyptian army and swept them away.

I always imagine what it was like for Israel coming out of Egypt. Even though they were cast out by the Egyptians at the end of the plagues, yet there were surely some among them who found themselves looking back over their shoulders and saying, "This is too easy. There's something wrong here. This can't be right. We can't really be free from Egypt." And, when some distance out they looked back and saw this cloud of dust rising in the distance, the cloud from the chariots and the horsemen, from the soldiers of the Egyptian army, they began to say, "I told you so! I told you so! We'll never be free - we can't ever be free from the bondage!" And when they came to the banks of the Red Sea, even with the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night which the LORD had supplied to protect them from that army, yet they came to the Red Sea with no way ahead. "I told you so! I told you so! We can never be free!" Then God opened the way, where there was no way, and they crossed over dry shod across the water. Yet, even as they were emerging on the other side, they saw the Egyptians begin to enter into that pathway behind them, and again, "I told you so! We can never be free - we'll never be free of that bondage - they are coming to carry us back!" But suddenly, as the last of the Israelites had finally crossed over to the other side, the waters returned and the Egyptian army that had plunged into that way was now swept away in the flood..

So let's stand at the far side of the Red Sea, if we may, with the people of Israel gazing back over those waters in amazement, in astonishment, in wonder and slowly beginning to think, "We're free. We're free for the first time in our lives - for the first time in generations - we're free!" Perhaps we may even take a few moments and indulge with them in the celebration which followed as Miriam began with the dance, and the song, the clapping of hands, the movement, the swaying, "I will sing unto the LORD for He has triumphed gloriously; the horse and rider He has thrown into the sea!" If it were a movie, this would look like a good place to start doing the fade out, perhaps have them walking off into the sunset, while the credits are rolling and you

have that sense that, “*They lived happily ever after.*” (I always, in my perverse way, imagine a scene featuring Aaron and Moses with their arms around each other saying, “Well this looks like the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”) However, we know that real life isn't like that - that fade-outs don't happen in real life (although, there are times, I have to confess, when I would like, in a difficult situation, to be able to fade out, and to fade back in when it had all been looked after; i.e. when we can all look back and laugh at what a time we had; but, again, real life isn't like that.)

They move on out into the wilderness and discover very quickly that, although they are free, technically-really, truly set free from their Egyptian bondage-it is quite another thing to learn to live as a free people. As soon as difficulties are encountered, they realize that they are, in their hearts, in their minds and in their wills, still in bondage. What I mean is that they carried with them into the wilderness vestiges of that bondage, of the mentality, the slave mentality. You see it as soon as they, (within the same chapter as the celebration), are without water, then they come to be without food. What's the first thing that arises? “What did you bring us out here into the wilderness for? Were there no graves back in Egypt? At least back in Egypt we had a home! At least back in Egypt we knew where we were when we woke up in the morning! At least in Egypt there was food! At least in Egypt there was something to do each day; we knew who we were and where we were. Why did you bring us out here? We want to go back!”

I want to highlight four marks - four residual marks of their bondage in Egypt - marks which they carry with them through the wilderness. In fact, that time in the wilderness was intended to be a time of forming them as God's people - not just being set free, but being formed as God's people and learning to live out the freedom which that entails - that they might be ready to enter into His promise. Sadly enough, we all know that some of that which they carried out of Egypt, they carried on into the new Land as well. In fact, the first time they arrived at the verge of the Promised Land, they couldn't enter in because they weren't ready. Faced with the challenges there, they longed to go back. They, like slaves buckled under, trusting not in God but looking only at their own weakness; and they turned away and went back out into the wilderness for forty years. So that generation died out and it was a new group which entered in, one that had known only the wilderness. But, of course, we know that even in the generations that followed in the Promised Land - and we'll think a little more about that as we go along - the same behaviours carried on, the same attitudes. In fact, the promise for those who entered fully into this freedom of being God's people was of perfect rest, the real peace which the LORD promised. If you read the letter to the Hebrews, you are reminded that that was a gift they didn't receive, even in the Land. No, because of sin and disobedience, they didn't receive in the generations that followed. That was awaiting a future time when we might enter into real freedom in Christ, and experience the peace that passes all understanding.

But back we go to the four marks which they carried; residual marks of the slave mentality.

The first is security, the deep need that they had for security. That is what we see come up in each of these times when they're challenged out in the wilderness when something isn't there. “Let's go back to Egypt. In Egypt we had things to hold onto. In Egypt we knew where we were everyday. Yes, we were in slavery, but we weren't at a loss like we are here.”

I have often been amazed over the years, in dealing with people who've come out of abusive situations, at some of the dynamics of what transpires when one has an opportunity to leave the

abuse. Take, for example, a woman being abused by her husband. Given a chance to step away from abuse - and I'm not talking about ending a marriage necessarily, nor taking lightly the marriage bond, simply a separation from the abusive behaviour - one reaction is to be afraid to do it, to refuse to leave. Another is to leave for a short time, but to go back without anything having changed; while another is to get out, but to live in terror and to be horribly fragile for a long while afterwards. Why? The attitude seems to be that the one who has come out of the abuse is prepared to say, "Yes, it was hell, but I learned how to live in hell. I learned how to cope day by day. Yes it was destroying me, but I learned how to survive; but when I stepped away from that, I stepped into new terrors and I have no idea how to manage them." And that's more overwhelming. It follows the old saying, I suppose, that the "devil you know" is to be preferred to the "devil you don't know".

In quite a different way of looking at it, I remember when I was in theological college studying with people who were from other parts of the country and of the world and talking with one colleague in particular who was from out in Alberta, and had dealt with the prairies. He spoke of how, coming into Ontario and being surrounded by all kinds of trees and things, he felt really hemmed in, or bound up. Well, for those of us who have grown up in Ontario and around treed areas, we may feel rather exposed when we're out in that open prairie where you can see forever and ever. Now we can, on both sides, adjust to those sorts of things, but it gives us something of the sense of discomfort experienced by the slaves who, having grown up with clear boundaries, now find themselves in an open space where so much is uncertain. Their previous life may not have been much fun, but they knew where they fit in; and to suddenly be removed from that and put in a situation where they don't know how to relate-even if they are free-can be terrifying. They experience this great need for security and their hearts long to go back to Egypt where they knew where they fit in

The second mark, going hand in hand with the first, is the "rosy memories" of Egypt, what I might call the false pleasures. What I'm thinking of is remembering the "good old days": "Ah, remember the good old days, the good times we had back in Egypt? It was so much better then." Of course, we all do some of that. "Back in the good old days men were men and we would do these things..." and someone else will say, "Yes, but they were hard days too; and with the good things you remember there were a lot of other problems." "Well yes, but..." Most of us don't really want to go back, but the heart longs back, remembering the fun, often glossing over the difficulties.

Interestingly enough when we deal with things around addictions that seems to be the key: you remember the pleasure; you remember the high; you're drawn back to that and what gets downplayed is the cost. You're drawn back in, but the dangers are overlooked. Of course the pleasures have very little to offer, all in all. One of the things about addictions is that, over time, it takes more and more to attain the same high, to experience the same pleasure. Often, even when you've reached it you're left feeling empty; but the effect is that you're drawn back into that bondage.

Now this is not to be confused with what Jesus said about a woman in her travail-the woman who experiences the pain at the time of her labour and yet finds that pain swallowed up in the pleasure and the joy of giving birth to the child; and that allows her to go back through the process again. No, that view is a realistic one of both: it sees the pain as it really is, but there's

something far greater, far more constructive, a deeper and lasting pleasure, a deep and lasting joy which eclipses the pain. That's not what we're talking about with the slave mentality. That's a false pleasure, not a rosy memory, in fact it's the real substance of joy. But the slave is drawn to a fairy tale world: "Boy, we had three square meals in Egypt, leeks and onions, sitting by the Nile...Did we ever have good times!" NO. NO! You were in bondage! But the heart longs back.

The third mark I have in mind is a fear of being different; a fear of standing out from the culture round about. Now how did Israel come to be in bondage in the first place? You remember they were brought into Egypt as the family of Joseph. Joseph was the great and honoured figure in Egypt. He was the one whom God raised up to look after things in the time of plenty and in the time of famine; to gather in the grain in the time of plenty so that there would be provision in the time of famine in Egypt and the surrounding area. He was also able to preserve his own people in that time and, when his family were first brought to Egypt, they were an honoured people. Their being singled out at that time was a wonderful thing. Then we get that simple line that rises up as we begin the book of Exodus: "There came to be a pharaoh on the throne who knew nothing of Joseph." All of a sudden this people of Israel, these descendants of Jacob, this family of Joseph, becomes a people singled out in suspicion and fear. They are foreigners in a foreign land; strangers in a strange land. They are conspicuous; ones to be feared for they are increasing in number. They're the outsiders. They're singled out and enslaved because of it. If you are a slave, do you really want to be singled out anyway? Usually the slave that is singled out is one who is in trouble. You really want to fit in. It would be nice to be singled out for some blessing, but most often what you really want to do is just blend in and be like everybody else. Well, what do we see in Israel as they go on through the wilderness but this earnest desire to fit in with the nations around them. A clear example, although this one doesn't occur until they are in the Land, takes place in the time of the judges when, as you may remember, they ask for a king. Samuel, the great prophet, the finest judge that Israel has ever had, is looking after them, and they say, "We want a king." Why did they want a king? Because all the other nations have a king. Samuel is devastated, but God says to him, "Don't fret Samuel; don't be dismayed. They're not rejecting you, they're rejecting Me, because you rule only under My authority My Dominion. Tell them they'll have a king, but also tell them what it will mean." In fact, to be under a king is to be in something of bondage when he's simply an earthly ruler. But there is Israel's desire: to be like all the other nations; to fit in. And again and again they go after the practices: the immorality, the false gods-whatever it happens to be, they want to fit in; they don't want to be distinguished. It's part of the slave mentality.

Which leads naturally into the fourth mark which is idolatry: the worship of false gods. Perhaps the best example of this can be seen as the people come to Mt Sinai. They had seen wonders and miracles of God even before they had left Egypt, and in the wilderness they had been provided with manna, quail, and water from the rock. God's provision had been experienced visibly and physically while Moses led them, but now they have come to Sinai and Moses has gone up the mountain to speak with God. It was, in fact, a time when the people were particularly uncomfortable with the LORD's presence. They'd actually said to Moses, "Look Moses you go and talk to God. Find out what it is that He wants to say to us, and then *you* tell us. We're afraid that if He speaks to us, we'll surely die." Now Moses has gone up the mountain to speak with the LORD. He's gone some time and people begin fret, to become really anxious. "We have been led out into this place by this God whom we can't see. Yes we've seen signs, but we really

don't know how to relate to Him. Well, what did they do in Egypt? They know how to relate to their gods; they have idols. They have idols and all the forms - the signs and the symbols - they know what they're doing. We know what was around us in Egypt, but now we've come out here and we have nothing-nothing! Moses was our only point of connection and now he's gone up the mountain. We don't know what's become of him. Aaron! Make us gods! Make us gods that will go before us. Make us something we can hold and carry with us." And Aaron takes their jewellery; he takes all the gold and the precious metals and he casts this golden calf, a bull calf. I've always loved his excuse afterwards. It's a fairly involved process, making this idol, but afterwards making excuse for himself he says, "Well,... er,... they gave me things, yes, and I just threw them in the fire and this calf came out!" (Scripture gives us a lot of that passing of the buck-passing the blame onto to someone else: "Hey, it's not really *my* fault."-from Adam and Eve onwards).

Anyway, what always puzzled me about this story, the making of the golden calf, was that I couldn't figure out how Israel, having seen the signs and wonders of the LORD, in this time of need could turn away from Him, turn away to other gods. The bull calf?-that sounds an awful lot like the Canaanite versions of Baal, some kind of a fertility god. How could Israel turn away?! They knew that they hadn't followed this "god" and yet there is Aaron saying "*Here, O Israel, are your gods* (or, "is your god") *which brought you up out of the land of Egypt*" Well it wasn't some other god, it was the LORD, it was YAHWEH! And then one day, as I came to read this story with a little more care - doing what most of us should do more regularly, actually reading what the story says, and not just starting in and thinking, "I know that story." and ceasing to pay any more attention - I realized that, thereafter, they were proclaiming a feast to the LORD - to YAHWEH. And it dawned on me what was going on. They weren't saying that this was some other god; they were saying that this was the idol *of the LORD!* Well why does that matter? "We're like the Egyptians now; now we've got the idol. Now we can carry him with us wherever we go." Its not so much worshipping the thing. It's imagining there's more than this idol itself, but they know that when they have this idol with them they have the deity with them as well. "We can carry him with us. We know how to relate to him. We can make sacrifices here, we can touch him, we can see him." Of course we all know what happened when Moses came down the mountain. He destroyed that idol and likewise smashed the 10 commandments - but that's part of the wider story. The slaves are drawn back to their idols.

What does an idol do? It sits in the centre of our lives - the touchstone where we set priorities, decide how to expend our resources - and determines what we really worship. It occupies the place reserved for God alone, yet not being God, it can never fulfil the requirements and, instead, draws us away from Him. Yet to this the slaves return.

Once more, the four marks of the slave mentality which is carried with them out of bondage are: 1) the deep need of security; 2) the drawing back of the heart to the "rosy memories", the false pleasures of Egypt; 3) the fear of being different; 4) idolatry.

Now, what we need to see as well, during Israel's time in the wilderness, is God's provision for these things. Perhaps we do well to begin with the fourth one because we were just looking at it. The great irony of what goes on in the wilderness, as they construct the golden calf out of this deep need to have something to hold onto - a way to relate to God - is that on the mountain top, God is giving to Moses the very things that they need. He's giving them laws and commandments. He is giving the people a priesthood, a sacrificial system - all the things that

they need - the way to worship; the way to construct a place of worship. He's going to give them all the things that they need to be able to relate to Him, to live as His people, and to worship Him *without* idolatry-to worship in a way that does not stop at something other than God, but leads them to Him.

In like fashion, each of the other areas, the other marks, is responded to by God; in the wilderness provision has been made. If you want a kind of 'focus chapter' to think about God's response, I would direct you to look at Deuteronomy chapter 8; and we'll keep that passage before us as we press on.

Regarding the first mark, this need for security; what does God give them? He provides them with a means of learning to trust Him-not to trust in any things: in walls around them, the daily routine, whatever; but to learn to trust in Him. How does He do it? By giving them the manna in the wilderness. Most of us are well acquainted with Jesus' words in the wilderness as He addresses the devil, responding to the first temptation: "*Command these stones that they might become bread.*" Jesus says, "*It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth God.'*" Where does that come from? Have you ever read the words in context? They come from Deuteronomy chapter 8. Let me read you the words which precede them, beginning at verse 2, "*You shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these 40 years in the wilderness to humble you, test you, and to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.*" Now remember: Deuteronomy - these are the words of Moses to the people of Israel as they stand on the edge of the Promised Land. This isn't the generation that came out of Egypt; they were turned back into the wilderness, because as slaves they were not prepared to trust God and to look to His victory in the Land. They turned back. Now it's a new generation and Moses is going back over everything that happened, reminding them of how they got there and what they need to know as they go into the land. So he continues, at verse 3, "*So He humbled you, allowing you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years.*" How intriguing. The whole business of them being without food in the wilderness and having to trust God's provision was to teach them to trust in Him-was to deal with that immense need for security. Do you remember how it went with the manna? They had to gather it every day - they couldn't gather extra. They were told, "If you gather more than you need for today and try to keep it, it will spoil." Some of them tried it and it did. The only time there was a difference was on the day before the Sabbath when they could gather extra and they were expected to because there would be none on the Sabbath, the day of rest. But what they gathered on that day before would be kept over without spoilage, a further sign of God's provision. Of course we also hear that some of them tried to gather on the Sabbath and there was nothing. But all of this was to teach them to trust in the LORD, that we don't live by bread alone-that we're not to put our security in these other things that are passing away, but to trust in the LORD. Yet, it's not just that He gives them that gift and promises them that they can trust in Him, He demonstrates it as well. He actually places them in a situation where they *must* rely on Him.

It's one of the sad features of our Christian lives that most of us know very little about the trustworthiness of God, about God's providence. Why? Because we so rarely trust Him. We so rarely allow ourselves to be in places where we trust in Him alone. We build up security; we

build around us things in which we believe we can trust. I don't mean to dismiss the practice of responsible budgeting, nor those who are skilled in financial management, but often *that's* where we put our trust. Accordingly, we have learned so little about what it is to trust in God. Now I know that many of us have learned to trust in certain areas of our lives-usually because we had no other choice - but we need to think about how to do so in every area. We ought to be challenged by those words from Deuteronomy, from the people's experience in the wilderness. I'll come back to that a little later as we move the reflection on into the New Testament.

The second mark was that they were drawn back to the "rosy memories" of Egypt, the false pleasures that were there, the stories of the "good old days". What is it that God gave them in response? He gave them a new story to replace the old one, He gave them a new memory to hold onto. They needed to re-form their memories. It was critical when they went into the Promised Land-and they were told this really from the time they left bondage in Egypt - that they remember how they got here. This comes up in Deuteronomy 8 as well. They were told, more or less, "When you get in to the Land and you get settled there and you plant fields and vineyards and you gather in the harvest and you build houses and you live in them; then you'll start thinking, 'It's by *my* strength; it's by *my* might, *my* skill; by *my* efforts that I came here, that I've accomplished these things; that I've acquired these things.' And in those times you need to remember the story; and when your children ask, 'How did we get here?' and 'Why do you do these things?', tell them the story, over and over again, how with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm the LORD brought us out of bondage in Egypt and into this place. It's by the LORD's provision alone that we come to be here."

You notice that as they go into the Land, they are told not just that they are to remember the story, but that they are to do things like bind up these promises, these scrolls of scripture, and put them up on the doorposts of their houses; and bind them to their foreheads and wrists. Some of it's symbolic - some of it's very graphic - but the heart of it is, "You need to have this etched in your memory. You need to look back to this story, for this is what forms you as a people, this is where you begin. Forget about Egypt. Forget about longing for that which would draw you back into bondage. Hold on to what the LORD has done, this new thing that your God has done for you, leading you out of bondage and into this place." Further to that, it's not just about looking back and getting the new memories installed. Yes, they are to draw upon what happened to bring them there, but God also sets before them His promise: their inheritance which is yet to come. They are to look forward as His people. So, God's provision for His people, in this case, deals not only with healing the old memories, reforming their history, but also with turning their gaze from back to front.

The third mark is the fear of being different. God responds by making them a *special* people. What's the problem with being different.? You're marked out as slaves? God says, "I've drawn you out; you're to be My children; you're to be My people. Israel is My first born." (Something that would be worth pursuing another time is the concept of the "first born" in Scripture. Traditionally, the first born male in the family is the primary heir; he represents the future, the line of the family. Following the Passover, when, as you will recall, judgement fell upon Egypt's first born, Israel is told that they must redeem their own first born, man or beast, in all subsequent generations - remember the presentation of our Lord by Mary and Joseph. It has to do with committing their future to God. But here, predicated of Israel, it implies that Israel has a leading role in God's plan for the future of the human race, as they inherit His promises, as they

fulfil His word to Abraham by whom all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. But more of that another time.). A special people; a holy people, chosen for the LORD; the children of Israel; the people of God; and, in Hosea, we see Israel as both the bride, albeit unfaithful, whose Husband pursues her with inexorable love, then as the “son” called out of Egypt by his Father. This response is developed more fully in the New Testament, and we’ll return to it in a few minutes.

Which would bring us to the fourth mark, but I began with that, noting that God’s response to idolatry is to offer them the means - laws, commandments, priesthood, sacrifices - of entering into true worship of Him without idolatry.

So we move on from that into the New Testament. I began by mentioning two bodies of water: the Red Sea and the Jordan River. I’ve spoken of the former, now I’d like to draw in the latter. Interestingly enough, the Red Sea is seen in Christian tradition as being a symbol of Christian Baptism, and that crossing over from our bondage to sin to freedom in Christ. In I Corinthians chapter 10, St Paul says, *“I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea and were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”* That’s a really interesting way of presenting things. But he’s catching the sense of Israel becoming a people - God’s people, redeemed from slavery - and presenting the crossing of the Red Sea as a type of Christian baptism. Moses was the forerunner of the Christ. He prophesied that one day a Prophet like himself would be raised up, One to whom the people were to attend with great care; and Jesus is this Prophet like Moses; in fact He is the “greater than Moses” who goes well beyond all that that prophet could do. With Jesus, we come now to the waters of the Jordan, where we find John the Baptist plunging people “under the flood.”

What is the baptism which John is offering? It’s a baptism “of repentance for the remission of sins”. It’s about being set free, delivered from bondage, the bondage of sin. John himself is clear, however, that what he’s doing is just a first step; there’s something more to follow. Yet, what he is calling people to is a real turning away from the old ways to a new beginning in their lives, one with practical consequences. Convicted by his message, many ask him “What are we to do?” I imagine that it was an incredible experience to come to those waters to make a visible, outward sign of willingness to turn their hearts from sin, to turn in God’s direction. What incredible freedom they must have felt, like a great weight had been lifted. But it is to be more than just a washing: *“Bear fruits worthy of repentance!”* John exhorted. They responded, “What are we to do?” and John gave them some very practical words. “Share the things you have: your food; if you have two cloaks, share with him who has none. Don’t take advantage of others. Show by your actions that your repentance is real.” And the focus of it all is the turning of their lives toward God in preparation for the One who is to come. *“This One”,* John said, *“who comes after me is greater than I. I’m not worthy to unfasten the thong of his sandal. I baptize you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”*

We know that when Jesus was baptized by John, something happened beyond anything the Baptizer had experienced before. Jesus came to the waters, not because He Himself had sin in need of remission-in fact you might recall John’s reluctance to baptize Him, *“I should be baptized by You, not You by me!”* - but rather that He might point the way that we all need to go - that all Israel needs to go-turning from anything which is not of the Lord and, with heart and soul and mind and strength, committing ourselves to the Father’s will to the Father’s ways. Although there was no barrier between Father and Son, yet Jesus expressed visibly His

submission to the Divine direction, His readiness for what God was about to do. And John testified that as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended and remained upon Jesus, and the voice of the Father declared, *“This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”*

We need sometimes to be reminded that our baptism as Christians is not simply the baptism of John. It’s not just a baptism *out of* sin - it’s not just a crossing of the Red Sea and being technically free from slavery. It’s a baptism *into* new life. It’s a baptism into Christ and the perfect freedom of His service—a baptism not only in water but with the Holy Spirit into a new relation to the Father. It’s Trinitarian baptism: into Christ Jesus the Son; the Holy Spirit comes to abide in our lives; and we hear the Father’s voice, spoken through His Church, declaring that we have been born again, made His sons and daughters by divine grace.

One of the problems with the Old Covenant, the old Law - not that it in its self was bad - was that it could not make us whole and complete. It could not make us completely free. Why? If you read St. Paul’s letter to the Romans you find, that struggle, *“I do not do the good that I want to do, but the evil that I don’t want to do is the thing that I do.”* There’s a great lament. You see, the law stands outside of himself - stands outside of *us* - as an external standard. And it’s good and it’s godly - Paul is clear on that - in fact, it’s the diagnostician: it identifies sin. All the things that seem to be wrong in us, though we may not know why - the effects of sin, the bondage that’s been there through the ages - the law identifies clearly what the problem is and sets before us God’s standard. The problem is that we can’t live up to it, not consistently, not constantly,

and so we stand condemned before it, *“Woe is me!”*, *“O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* There is a way; the prophets point forward - *“Behold, the days are coming”, says the LORD, ‘when I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.’*” - heralding a new relation to God. What’s it all about? Through Jeremiah God declares, *“I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts...”*; and by Ezekiel, *“I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you...I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgements and do them.”* In contrast to commandments written on stone, these statutes will be written on human hearts; rather than striving to conform ourselves to an external standard, we shall be

transformed by God Himself, working to change us from the inside out. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit; that’s the gift of the Spirit in our baptism into Jesus Christ. And what is effected is a new relationship with the Lord, not simply that of “Master and slave”, though we are to serve Him, living in submission to the ways of the Kingdom; nor even simply “children”, in the generic sense whereby all human beings are children of the one heavenly Father; but the language of the New Testament in Jesus, reflected in St. Paul, is that we become *“sons of God”!*

Now it’s important, when that term “sons” of God is used, that we not misunderstand it as a male only reference. I have heard (New Testament scholar) Dr. Edith Humphrey say on a number of occasions, that when Paul uses the term “sons” of God and some translators want to render it as “children”, saying that it includes both male and female, sons and daughters: it’s not the believers’ gender he’s talking about here. Rather, he’s talking about our relation to God, more specifically to the Son. He is *the* Son of God-capital “S” Son—we are the little “sons of God” by

our likeness to Him. This is in keeping with our understanding that, as He is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, we are the little “anointed ones”, anointed by the Holy Spirit, and hence “christs” in that sense, though more properly “Christians” - it’s our relation to Him; it’s our likeness to Him; it’s our being *in* Him.

So, under the New Covenant, in the context of this new relationship with God, what response do we find to those marks of the slave mentality which we drew out of the Old Testament? For they do carry on into the New, and they continue with us even to our day. They’re features now, not of servitude to Egypt, but of slavery to sin. A helpful passage of Scripture for focusing our reflection is the sixth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, part of the “Sermon on the Mount”, particularly the last part of the chapter, where Jesus begins to talk about “Treasures in heaven”: *“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*

The first of the marks is security: the things we trust in; the things we hold onto; the things to which we need to cling. We reflected earlier about how Israel carried out of Egypt this desire to have the things to which they knew how to relate and how God led them out, and in the wilderness fed them with the manna in order to teach them to trust His provision day by day. What does Jesus have to say about it? In Matthew six, He talks about the impossibility of serving two masters, God and Mammon. Now serving is bound up with worshipping, with loving; you cannot love - you cannot worship - both God and Mammon. Now what’s Mammon? Well, a lot of translations render “Mammon” as “money” or “riches”, and in some ways that’s a fair translation, but in other ways it is unfortunate, because most of us can’t imagine serving or worshipping money. You know, if we have money in hand, we’re not going to lay a few dollars on the table and bow down before them and bring them sacrifices. No, no, no, we don’t worship money in that sense; but what is money? It’s not really a thing unto itself so much as it is a symbol. What is it a symbol of? It’s a symbol of power. What kind of power? Power to acquire things for myself. I figure that, if I have enough money, I can do *anything* that *I* want to do. And it focuses on myself.

We actually have set up here a classic confrontation: I worship God, or I become my own “god”. That’s what it was in the Garden, not so much turning to the Devil as listening to his words and trusting in our own judgement, that we might become “like God...” - or, as some translations put it, that we might “become gods” - “...knowing good and evil.”; then we won’t need God to direct us. It’s choosing to follow self will rather than God’s will.

“Mammon” was, in fact, the name of a Syrian god of wealth; and I think that it’s often more help to think of this as rival deities that we’re looking at serving, worshipping, loving-letting rule our lives! And, as I was saying before, what is it that the “god”, the idol - what we worship - does in our lives? It forms the centre: “Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” What we value most highly sets everything else in its place. Now, most of us would say that we don’t worship idols; we don’t serve rival deities; yet I would challenge you to think about it. If you’re convinced that God wants you to do something, or you believe that the right thing to do, according to God’s commandment, is a particular thing, what makes you hesitate? What keeps you from doing it-maybe from doing it at all, maybe from doing it right away? Think about it: there’s a higher priority that kicks in; there’s something else that takes precedence over what you perceive to be God’s will. Is there a rival here? An idol setting the priorities? Sometimes it’s pride. Sometimes it’s that fear of being different. Perhaps it’s something else; but, whatever it is, it draws us away from whole-hearted obedience - worship - of God.

Jesus go on by dismissing right away this business of serving Mammon. He doesn't even bother discussing it further, rather, He proceeds to describe what it means to serve God, to worship Him, and to live under His reign, His dominion. "*Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on.*" What's He talking about? The most basic of fundamental needs, daily needs: food, drink, clothing, shelter. "Go back into the wilderness;" (think about Deuteronomy 8) "Remember, when you were without food and without water; God supplied. You needed clothing and your clothes didn't wear out in all that time. Look around you; look at God's creation. Look at the birds of the air; look at the lilies of the field. They're provided for, and what do they do in worrying about those things?" Now we're wrong if we imagine that He's saying that they don't do anything. What they do is what God created them to do. They're going about their business; they're doing the things that God made them for. "What about you?" Jesus doesn't say, "Don't do anything; just wait. Don't worry about these things, just sit around, don't do your work, don't do anything else, just wait for God to drop into your lap the things that you need." He doesn't say that. He does say, "*Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*" In other words, "Get on with doing what God wants you to do. Make His will your first priority." It's not so much that these things-your daily needs-don't matter, but you need to be focussed first on what God requires and, out of that comes everything else. Remember that Jesus said something about how, if a man, "*loves his family more than Me, he is not worthy to be My disciple.*"-or even more strongly, on another occasion, that unless he "*hates*"(!) them he can't follow. Granted, that is deliberate hyperbole; Jesus does not really want us to hate our families, to despise or neglect them, in order to follow Him. But He does demand that our first priority be crystal clear: we are to begin with our commitment to Him. Then we are to bring to Him all the most important things in our lives. First we are to focus on doing what He requires, then out of that comes our love of family, love for husband or wife, how we use the wealth that we have, and so on, regarding everything we have. The contrast is made between the one who lives this way and the one who, with priorities reversed, worries about things instead. And the latter is like the "Gentiles", the other nations. Now, usually that term, "Gentiles", refers to the non-Jews, whereas here it clearly refers to the "unbelievers", or more specifically, "those who do not know that they have a Father in heaven". You are to live as those who know that you have a Father in heaven. He is *your* Father and you are to live as His sons. That's the heart of our Lord's response to this first mark of the slave mentality - and, of course, it also addresses something of the last as well, that of idolatry; but we'll come back to that.

What about the second mark: the "rosy pictures of what life was like" back in bondage? Well sin certainly draws us back in that way. We need, like Israel needed, to remember the story. What's our story? The Gospel: what God has done in Jesus Christ. One of the really amazing things, I know in my own life, is that that the more that I am focussed on the things of the Cross, what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, the more overwhelmed by that I am, the less inclined I am to sin. I remember who I am. I recall how I came to be here. I remember what I owe Him. More particularly, I remember the cost of the Cross-not just what He's given me, but what He has done: His sacrifice; His suffering; His Passion; the rending of His flesh and the shedding of His precious Blood! - what all this has meant; and it overwhelms me and puts everything else in perspective. Accordingly, one of the most important features of the Christian life in dealing with this enticement back into sin, is to come to confession; to bring things into God's light, confessing the sin. Because, fundamentally, that's what confession is really all about: bringing

things into the light to be exposed. The devil works in lies, in darkness; and insofar as we bring everything in our lives into the light, the power of the devil is disarmed - the power of those sins to draw us back in - because we see things as they really are. When they're exposed in such fashion they lose their seductive quality. The devil likes to work with half-truths, to confuse us, to make things unclear. Looking back, he helps us to recall something of the pleasure, but our memories are fuzzy regarding other things, like the cost. Confession is about bringing things into the Light, remembering what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, remembering how we came to be where we are; and we find there the freedom from that old story that drew us back into bondage, so that we can embrace the new story which forms us. But, as with the people of Israel, it's not just the looking back, it's the looking forward to the fulfilment of all of God's promises. In a longer session, we might devote time to exploring more of what unfolds in the Revelation - the Apocalypse - regarding the glorious things which are to come, and I'm sure that we would all be blessed through the exercise; but today I simply want to emphasize that we are not to stop where we are. While we, now through faith in Christ, enjoy a certain measure of freedom, we are not yet complete; we can experience something of His peace now, but the fullness is yet to come. So we look forward, as memories are re-formed and we struggle to stay free of past sins, and press on towards what St. Paul called the "*glorious liberty of the children of God*". (*Romans 8:21*)

Which brings us now to the third mark: the fear of being different. I expect that you all know something of that one and the power that it has over us in our day, especially as Christians - the great, great fear we have of being at odds with the culture. Why? Because it leads to persecution; because it leads to discomfort. We don't want to be singled out. What's the New Testament response? Again, God tells us that we're called out to be a holy people, a peculiar people, God's own people. He loves us - He loves *you*. Jesus died for *you*. "Herein is love; not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." You have been chosen to be, not simply servants, or even some kind of generic children, but to be His sons - true sons and daughters of the Father, brothers and sisters of Jesus - to be gathered into that most intimate relation that one can have with the Father. St. Paul wrote that we're given the Spirit of sonship, the Holy Spirit dwelling in our hearts, stirring up in us the cry of, "Abba, Father". You are special, precious to God. Which does mean being different in the eyes of the world. But, if I might draw on an image from the Revelation, we are reminded, as Samuel learned long ago, "God does not see as man sees." There's a scene which greets St. John's eyes, a vision of heaven and those gathered around the throne of God. It's in the seventh chapter of the Revelation, and I'm sure that you'll recognize it from the Propers from All Saints Day. The seer observes innumerable white-robed figures worshipping before God's throne and he is asked, "*Who are these...and whence came they?*" He is unable to supply the answer, but it is given him. "*These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*" In the eyes of the world, they seemed to be lost, failures, abandoned by God; but they are precious in His sight; they stand before the throne, worshipping day and night.

So, finally we come to the last of the marks, that of idolatry set against true worship. Something of this response has been touched upon already when we looked at treasure, the heart and trusting God. Jesus pointed to the way of trusting the Father in the smallest things of daily life and I suggested that this trust has to do with not only serving God, but loving and worshipping Him. What more does the Lord offer by way of response to enable us to be free of idols and led

into true worship? It is no longer the sacrificial system offered under the Old Covenant. There is a new sacramental system in which we are offered the opportunity to worship Him in Spirit and in Truth, to be made members of Christ, partakers of His grace, to draw near in the intimacy of the Holy Communion, the Mass, and to encounter His living Presence in the Blessed Sacrament. And yet, dare I say, even more than that, He comes to dwell in us by His blessed Holy Spirit. Here is not simply a chance to draw near Him for a moment, to encounter Him in a glorious service of worship, nor even to have Him walk with us for a time; but to have our lives - our very bodies - become temples of the Holy Spirit! Far too many of us imagine that the Spirit comes to us as a Guest, albeit an highly honoured One, in *our* house. As long as He is a guest, He may be honoured, He may have freedom to come and go and to roam about as He pleases, but He continues to be a Visitor from outside, staying in *my* house. But such is not the language of the New Testament. "*Do you not know*", wrote St. Paul, "*that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? You were bought at a price.*" What is a temple? It's a place of worship: worship of the One to whom it is dedicated. It is *His* house, where *He* is to honoured, worshipped and obeyed.

One final thought about the slave mentality is that the slave holds on to the one thing that he believes he can call his own: himself. His body may belong to his master, along with his time, his energy and everything else that he has; but, somewhere inside he holds onto who he is apart from all of that. He has private thoughts, and sometimes, when his suffering, physical or emotional, seems too overwhelming, he retreats there, to the one place he can call his own. But the One who calls us out of bondage to freedom, calls us through the Cross. He says that whoever would follow Him must "*deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" If you want to find who you really are - if you desire to be truly free - you do so, not by clinging to that inner sense of self in the midst of bondage, but by yielding your life to Jesus. We meet Him in the Cross, where we let go of all that has come before, even our sense of who we are, our identity. We are baptized into His death; the slave dies, leaving the sin - the bondage - in the grave; we are then raised up as new creatures in Christ - yet more ourselves than we ever were before - alive and free in Him.

Here is the movement from bondage to the perfect freedom of His service. Again, not just once delivered, technically free from our fetters, that we may live our own lives apart from Him. No, that's the way of self-will, that draws us back into bondage, into the slavery of sin. No, we're set free to live as He designed us to live: obedient to His will, focused in the Cross, dying daily to sin, yielding the slave mentality, offering "ourselves, our souls and bodies to be a reasonable holy and living sacrifice unto Thee." From bondage to the perfect freedom of His service. And so we pray,

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom: Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries; through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (B.C.P. p.11)