

OUR LADY STAR OF THE SEA WEYMOUTH
HOMILY FOR THE 3rd SUNDAY OF LENT
7th MARCH 2010

It's the third Sunday of Lent.

Keeping the promises is getting harder. Some of the self-sacrifices have already been compromised or abandoned. It seems a long time to Easter. This is the time of year when Lent and even life can be very discouraging. Our opening prayer recognises this.

We prayed: "When we are discouraged by our weakness, give us confidence in your love."

The challenge is to regain our confidence in God's love. The readings should help us. The first reading takes us to Egypt where the Israelites, the people of God, have been the slaves of the Egyptians for a long time and there is no end in sight for them.

God's answer is to call Moses to lead his people to encourage them and eventually lead them to freedom. God said to Moses: "I am well aware of their sufferings."

God does not change. If he was well aware of their sufferings he is well aware of our sufferings. That's something to be thankful for, but it may not be enough to bring relief to all who are enslaved by the discouragement of unemployment, poverty, caring for elderly relatives, not achieving at school.

We need a Moses.

In fact we have one – our Lord Jesus Christ. In the second reading Paul makes the connection. Jesus is our Moses. He tells the Corinthian Christians that although Moses led the people through the desert to freedom, it was Jesus who was sustaining them. Jesus led them through the Red Sea just as he leads us through the waters of baptism. Jesus fed them with manna and water just as he feeds us with the blessed sacrament of the Mass

Jesus will lead us out of our discouragement but only if we let him.

Paul warns us that some of the Israelites lost faith and desired "forbidden things".

They looked for other ways of dealing with their discouragement and they died in despair.

Jesus cannot help us if we look elsewhere for help. Hard though it may be we must look to him and him alone for consolation and encouragement.

Jesus himself speaks to us in the Gospel, as he always does. He tells us what he expects of us – repentance. Repentance means that we take responsibility for our condition. He does not expect us to save ourselves, nor does he expect us to change the world. He does not expect us to bankrupt ourselves by giving to every disaster appeal, to find jobs where none exist, to abandon those who need our care 24/7 nor to achieve beyond our ability.

What repentance means is to be realistic – to change what we can change and to pray God to change that which is beyond our power. By keeping ourselves focussed on Jesus in constant

prayer we will reduce the risk of putting our faith in distractions that will disappoint us and discourage even more.

Jesus makes a further important point.

Those who were killed when the tower collapsed at Siloam were the victims of an accident. Suffering beyond our control is an accident. It is not the will of God. It is not punishment. Earthquakes, unemployment, chronic disability, depression are accidents, the result of natural causes, not the will of God. If they are not the will of God then it *is* God's will to relieve suffering, to bring healing as Jesus did.

Accidents by definition are random events. They have absolutely no connection with the spiritual or moral status of the victims, so we must never think of accidents as punishment. They are not. We have to thank St. Luke for recording this statement of Jesus. It should clear away a lot of unnecessary discouragement.

So let's pray that we will make a realistic response, if we are discouraged.

Let's pray to avoid false consolations.

Let's do what we can to help ourselves and trust our Lord to be with us when we cannot.

He is aware of our sufferings. He wants to deliver us from our discouragement.

Let us pray for confidence in his love.

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