

“Remember” (Homily)

Deacon John Fulton, St. Kevin Roman Catholic Church, Warwick, Rhode Island
March 10, 2019 -- 1st Sunday of Lent -- Deuteronomy 26:4-10

“He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm.”

And so we begin the season of Lent, a time of meditation and renewal, of remembering, and turning back, of remembering who we are: Who made us, Who owns our next breath, Who loves us and stands by us and saves us, if only we ask—if only we remember to ask.

For just as the Jews to whom Moses spoke, we are all wandering Arameans—all of us—who, time and time again, go down into the “Egypt” of our lives, seeking fortune and power, and other worldly allurements. And we find them, don’t we? The allurements we seek? If not one bad habit, then another. If not one addiction, then another. If not one abuse—of ourselves and others—then another.

Like the Jews of old, we become complacent, do we not? Indeed, we become comfortable with our habits and addictions and abuses, so gently does Satan work in our lives, so softly, so caressingly, so hypnotically. We become comfortable in our “Egypt” and forget our roots: the place from which we came, and, God willing, to which we will go, when the One who owns our next breath decides to withhold it, and there is no next breath.

We forget our roots, and thus, from time to time, like the Jews of old, find ourselves enslaved—enslaved in “Egypt” of our own making, powerless to free ourselves. But there is one who can free us and will free us, if only we remember His name, if only we cry out to Him. He will free our souls from slavery. Listen to the words of good Saint Paul. Listen carefully.

“Brothers and sisters: What does Scripture say?
The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart
—that is, the word of faith that we preach—
for if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord,
and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead,
you will be saved.” (Cf. Rom 10:8-9)

In short, if we remember Who made us, if we remember Who loves us and stands by us, if we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, if we cry out to Him from the “Egypt” of our lives, he will come, and free our souls from slavery, again, and again, and again. “Oh Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”

In love, our God creates us, and in love, He takes us back. He asks so little of us: To love Him and His creation. And when we falter, he understands. “For he knows how we are formed, remembers that we are dust.” (Ps. 103:14) Thus “He will not always accuse, and nurses no lasting anger; He has not dealt with us as our sins merit, [...] as our wrongs deserve.” (Ps. 103:9-10) Instead, He loves us the more, sending His Son to take our sins upon Himself, asking only that we believe.

Make *memory* your Lenten goal. In whatever “Egypt” you find yourselves, remember your roots. Focus on them: the place from which you came, and, God willing, to which you will go. Remember the graces God has given you so freely: life itself, intelligence, freedom, appreciation of beauty, first loves and enduring loves, family and friends, and the Body and Blood of His only Son. Remember God’s graces, and be thankful for them. Gather your thanks together, and make an offering of them to the Lord, your God, bowing in His presence. *Remember who you are.*

Deuteronomy 26:4-10

Moses spoke to the people, saying:

"The priest shall receive the basket from you
and shall set it in front of the altar of the LORD, your God.

Then you shall declare before the Lord, your God,

'My father was a wandering Aramean
who went down to Egypt with a small household
and lived there as an alien.

But there he became a nation
great, strong, and numerous.

When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us,
imposing hard labor upon us,
we cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers,
and he heard our cry

and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression.

He brought us out of Egypt
with his strong hand and outstretched arm,
with terrifying power, with signs and wonders;
and bringing us into this country,
he gave us this land flowing with milk and honey.

Therefore, I have now brought you the firstfruits
of the products of the soil
which you, O LORD, have given me.'

And having set them before the Lord, your God,
you shall bow down in his presence."