

Introduction to the Reading for Easter Vigil and First Mass of Easter

Old Testament: Exodus 14: 10-31; 15: 20-21

The Easter Vigil Service sets some nine OT readings from which a minimum of three must be chosen, always using the Exodus account of the crossing of the Red Sea. These readings set out the salvation history of Israel as the nations are judged, then Abraham chosen and faith is established through him. It then jumps to God's deliverance of the people as they flee from Egypt; and the subsequent falling and rising of the relationship is alluded to, during which God's true nature is revealed in the account of the Suffering Servant.

The Exodus reading shows how hard it was for the Israelites to trust in God. In spite of the plagues with which the Egyptians had been afflicted, at every setback, they long for the certainties they had left behind, however unpleasant they had been. Again and again, over the years of wandering, Moses had to reassure them and urge them on. No wonder God complained to Moses at their lack of trust. Did God act directly or indirectly to divide the waters? We need to realise that natural events as recorded in the Bible are interpreted with the eye of faith, without going into the details as to how something came about. We should always remember that God seldom acts directly, since a small act by God could have the effect similar to a match on a pile of explosives. One can understand the song of Miriam rejoicing in the destruction of the Egyptians, but to my mind it always hits a jarring note on what was then a catastrophe. All this raises the question on how far we really trust in God?

Epistle: Romans: 6: 3-11

In the early Church, Baptism was administered at Easter, on the day of the Resurrection. The catechumen, having undergone a period of training and discipline through Lent, received Baptism, dying to their old life and rising again to the new life in Christ. It should be remembered that Baptism at that time was always adult Baptism, and involved a confession of faith and total immersion, so the symbolism of dying and rising could be clearly understood. This would have been nothing strange to the then world. The Jews used Baptism as part of the entry of a Jewish child; and the Greek world were familiar with the notion of dying and rising as this was often incorporated into postulants for the mystery religions. The newly Baptised Christian was committed to a new way of life in union with Christ.

Gospel: Mark 16: 1-8

This passage from Mark is well chosen for the eve of Easter. It tells of the women, prevented from visiting the tomb because of the Sabbath, go there as early as possible on the next day, worrying about the blocked entrance and on arrival, they find the stone rolled aside and are told that Jesus has risen and so is not there. The result is fear, so much so that they told no one, presumably not even the disciples, who were meeting in fear in the upper room, afraid that all their hopes had been dashed. We know from subsequent events that despair was turned to joy as they and the women met with the risen Christ, surely the greatest proof of the reality of the resurrection. Jesus is not a subject for discussion, but a person to be met in a dynamic relationship, reaching out to restore us all, even Peter!

