

**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.**

In our first reading, we hear the command to the people of Israel to offer their first-fruits of the harvest to God in thanksgiving. It reveals to us something that is best summed up in the idiom “Always Remember and Never Forget”.

The importance of certain memories within Jewish history has served to sustain both the people and their heritage through wars . . . and exiles into faraway places, through ancient occupations and the suffering the thousands of pogroms throughout Christian history and even the unspeakable evil of the Holocaust.

Their identity, be it individual or national, has always been linked to who God is and what God has done for them.

It is God who formed them and claimed them as His own. It is God who freed them from bondage in Egypt, it is God who led them through the desert, fed them with manna and quail and refreshed them with water from the rock at Horeb. It is God who defeated their enemies at Jericho.

This connection to the help of God, this persistence of memory, gave them both their identity and their hope. They were God’s people – so God will provide. The many attributes given to God by the Israelites are a testament to this.

He is a rock, a fortress, a mighty bulwark and a lamb. He defends with His right hand and He shepherds us to lie in green pastures. In tough times and in peace- God provides.

(PAUSE)

When we hear this familiar account of Jesus' temptations after His time of fasting and prayer, we are tempted to focus on the battle between Jesus and the Devil. We might see the Scriptures as the weapons of this warfare, and that is accurate, but it is also incomplete. Perhaps the greatest weapon of Christ was identity, specifically His Jewish identity that was enflamed by memory.

The use of Scripture to defeat the enemy is not incidental for Scripture is powerful, but this battle is more than a fencing match with Sacred Words.

It tells us about our God.

What is important to understand in this exchange is that God is in charge – He has provided in the past, and will provide now. God can be trusted – and as Paul reminds us - ***No one who believes in him will be put to shame.***

If you believe, you will remember.

This is the corporate memory of the Jewish people – and it is our memory as well.

We too passed through the waters of the Red Sea from slavery into freedom through baptism. But it was not by our power – God provided.

When our sinful humanity is at its lowest, when we are helpless to redeem ourselves – God provides in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

When our nature is poor, when we hunger for the Divine, which we cannot feed ourselves – God provides . . . not with manna, but with the Bread of Angels, His own body and blood.

Our Lord says “do this in memory of me”. In recalling, we do more than just remember, we make present all that God has done. This is our shared heritage.

And in our remembering we grow in confidence in what He is yet to do. This is our shared inheritance.

It is mine, it is yours, it is ours.

The season of Lent often seems to be a burden, something that we just need to get through these 40 days so we can get back to normal.

But these 40 days are meant to be something else. God wants us to redefine normal to include His providence.

So we fast, we pray, we give and we gather.

We will hear Scriptures each Sunday that are not drab or dreary but filled with images of hope and life. The Lenten texts are of forgiveness, restoration and a deep abiding love. They are full of mercy and tenderness.

Lent is a time to come to grips with who we are and how God sees us.

It is a time of preparing not for the metaphorical desert, but for when we leave it. Lent is a progression, a progression toward God, toward ourselves and toward others.

One way to go forward this season . . . is by looking back.

We are invited to reflect on what God has done for us, how He was uniquely present in all of the times we thought Him to be absent or silent. Take the time to discover and rediscover His presence here among us a family of faith, one that shares a deep heritage of Scripture, Salvation, Sacrifice and Sacrament.