

Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”

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So it is written in the book of Deuteronomy, one of those books we dread to read. Who is Moses speaking to? He is speaking to Israel. So who shall this new Prophet be like? He shall be like Moses.

Who was Moses? He was the response to a cry. Who was Moses? He was the answer to a plea; a great plea, a plea and cry so profound that it took the form not of words or of prayers, but in the form of suffering and agony; of sweat and of blood; with *groanings that cannot be uttered*. Groanings and cries of a people of bondage, slavery; crushed in oppression, choked in chains. These, the Hebrews, to whom chosen Moses was sent, are your *fathers and mothers, and sisters and brothers*. Our ancestors in faith: These Hebrews, to whom chosen Moses was sent, *groaned within themselves, with groanings that cannot be uttered[...]*waiting for adoption, the redemption of the body.

So the Lord sent Moses, aged, and weak, to be their deliverer, that the Hebrews *come out* of the Land of the Egyptians, and be adopted as the people of God; that they might be redeemed.

Moses was weak, but the Lord is power. More than power, He is Dreadful, Terrifying. Do not be deceived. We do not address our prayers and bow our heads to a God who is harmless. We address our prayers to a God who is violent, and who is good. A God who's mere sight makes the living as if they are dead, as with St. John in his Revelation; a God that makes the dead as if they are living, as with Lazarus in his Resurrection.

Do you think of Him whom you call upon when you pray 'Our Father'? Do you

think of Him whom you call upon when you bless your meal, saying 'Come Lord Jesus'? When you pray 'Bless us, and these thy gifts'

Let me tell you of the God of Moses, the lover of Israel, who took vengeance upon the Egyptians for having dared to oppress his people.

The rivers of Egypt were made into blood, that the Egyptians would be choked with thirst; that they may see in their rivers the blood they had shed when they slaughtered the children of the Hebrews when *they grew too numerous*.

The lands were overcome with frogs, and with biting insects; with raging, devouring beasts, and with flies; that the Egyptians should know that they had lost their humanity, and had become as animals, and a pestilence to the earth.

And burning hail fell from heaven, and decimated the monuments and idols of Egypt, that they might know their gods are nothing, that *God alone is the Lord*.

And the Lord sent locusts to consume their crops and food, that they might know hunger, for no longer would even the dust of the earth serve them, so great was their iniquity, so hateful was their sin against Israel in the sight of the Lord.

Then Darkness covered the land of Egypt, that they should see nothing, and neither be seen; for such was the darkness of their hearts; those who oppressed and murdered, and offered sacrifices to lifeless idols.

And finally, the firstborn of all men, and of animals and livestock and beasts were destroyed by an angel of the Most High, that they, even they, might know that the God of Moses, who loved Israel, might know that *He is the Lord*.

Now when you pray, when you say in your innermost self 'Dear Lord,' know that it is this God whom you call upon. The lover of Israel, and destroyer of evil, who called unto his people *come out of the Land of Egypt* and crushed the oppressors of his beloved nation *with a strong arm*.

And why did He, the Lord, cast so many dread plagues upon Egypt? It is simple. He loved Israel, and Israel, whom he loved, cried out in the depth of their Spirit, 'deliver us.' 'And the Lord heard their cry.'

Now we hear: "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me. Unto him ye shall hearken.""

Who is this Prophet who Moses speaks of? It is Jesus. How is He *like thy brethren*? He is *bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, born of Mary*. For we confess *He was made man*.

And why shall we *hearken unto his voice*? That we may no longer hear the voice of our ancient foe, but shall '*hear, O Israel, the Lord is Our God*,'

How is he *like unto Moses*? He is frail, he is weak, and yet by his weakness, he has, and does, and forever shall destroy all who oppress his people.

And who is His people? All the baptized. You and I.

And why shall he destroy our oppressor? Because He loves us, even as loves Himself, for *no man ever hated his own body*, and *have not all who have eaten of the body of Christ become the body of Christ*? You every week come to this altar. You every week eat of the sanctified bread and wine, made the body and blood of Christ. In these, in His flesh, you are made His body. And *No man ever hated his own body*.

You come to this holy altar, and here become one with Jesus, One with God. In love to God, and beloved by God. And even as God destroyed the oppressors of His beloved in ancient time, so shall He destroy the oppressors of His beloved now. For you eat the flesh and drink the blood not of a harmless God, but of the God of power, Dreadful and Terrifying, He is not harmless; He is not safe; but He is good. *For who is good, but God?*

What is it that oppresses you? You may think: 'My friends take advantage of me.' You may think 'My husband does not treat me as he should.' You may think 'My wife does not appreciate all I do for her.' You may think 'This Church has no gratitude for all I have sacrificed for it.' You may think 'My children have abandoned me, and never call me.'

Verily, I say to you, these are not your oppressors. They, with you, are oppressed. They, with you, are in bondage to sin. They, with you, whether they know it or not, are '*awaiting the adoption, the redemption of the body*.' Therefore, have mercy on them, in all their weakness, in all their foolishness, for they, like you, are blinded, fooled, foolish, and crushed. They too, await the final redemption of the coming of the Lord.

So look upon those who bring misery in your life, and say not 'You idiot', for *Whoever shall say 'Thou fool' shall be in danger of hell fire*. Rather, say as St. Ignatius, a holy martyr of our Church, say with him, as he looked upon a man who sinned against him, *'Hypocrite! Fellow! Brother!'*

For they are fellow sinners, which is to say, they are your brothers and sisters, your kin. Look on them, whether husband or wife or child or friend, with deepest compassion. I will not tell you to not be angry, for there is a place for your anger; indeed, there is a place for wrath. But it is not with your fellow man. It is against the Deceiver, the devil himself, who divides man from man, who brings sin and hate into the souls of weak mortal Christians, even as he fills the hearts of the godless with violence and foolishness; who whispers temptations into our ear, and speaks hateful thoughts into our minds. *Whose mouth is an open sepulcher; who is the father of lies.*

It is he whom you shall hate, for it is he whom the Lord Jesus has hated, for He, Christ, Our Redemption and our Life, He loves His beloved mankind.

So even as the Israelites prayed in the depth of their hearts 'deliver us.' So we complete their prayer, as the Lord taught us, *'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'*

A time is coming soon, dear Christians, when Lent comes, when the Holy Week of Our Lord's Passion comes, when Good Friday comes, that we will see *him who is like unto Moses*, raised up to smite *the spirits of the power of the air*; when we will see Him *descend into hell*, there to decimate our true and only enemy, Satan, with plague upon plague, and to lead us, His people, to the blessedness of His promised heaven, more terrifying than *a pillar of cloud by day*; more dreadful than *a pillar of fire by night*, more beautiful than an *ocean of sapphire*. Our God, and Our Redeemer, who loves us even as *His own body*.

Do you not know this is what He has come to do? To shut the *mouths of them that speak lies*? To destroy our enemy; to *deliver us from evil*?

It is very obvious. One need only recall [the strong word of] Gospel reading for today.

'And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out,

Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God.

'And Jesus rebuked him, saying, be silenced, and come out of him.'

To Christ alone be all glory, honor, and dominion.

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Deuteronomy 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; Mark 1:21-28.