

Sunday, August 02, 2009

St Mary's Castleton

Ex 16:2-4, 9-15; Ps 78:14-20, 23-25; Eph 4:17-25; John 6:24-35

### **Freedom is not free of cost.**

In reflecting on the readings for today, I thought about the **immigrants through thousands of years into Northern America**. There were those immigrants from Asia up to twelve thousand years ago. They traveled over the Bering land bridge, via Alaska. There were the Mayan and Aztec cultures, and all that followed from that. There were the Viking immigrants, about a thousand years ago. More recently, there were the immigrants of the last few hundred years, from Africa and from Europe.

All of those immigrants to North America, from Asia, Africa, and Europe, **have experienced extreme difficulty**, of one kind or another either before or during their journey to North America. The journey for each of them to Northern America was extremely costly. But in **the life they found in North America** eventually **had a future**, or at least a promise. There was the hope of at least of some better quality of life than they would otherwise have had before or during their journey to North America. Through all those many centuries, **that promise, and future freedom was not free of cost.**

**In our own time**, in these very months of 2009, **we are rediscovering that freedom is not free of cost. At this moment, we are experiencing the cost of freedom both in terms of finance, and also of physical security.** Forty years (or more) ago the banks invented the consumer credit card. But now the whole world knows that there is no limitless financial credit card. Once again we are learning the hard way that freedom is not free of cost.

So if freedom is not free, then **so it is also with the other principal values of life, like love and justice.** At first glance, each of **these** seem to be freely available. Yet, on the other hand, they are very costly. Love costs a lot of commitment.

The principal **values** of life, love, freedom, and justice **are costly on the one hand; and on the other, they do have a future** and a promise. It is a future and a promise of a quality that makes the price worth paying. So the very best things in life take commitment, and sometimes – as we can see in the list of the war dead - the price may be life itself.

**In the first of our readings today**, in the wilderness, **the Israelites** had been delivered from slavery (in Egypt), and were on their journey to a land of their own, that God would give them (in Canaan). But the **journey**

**into freedom was costly and hard**, and they were hungry. God gave them manna in the desolate wilderness. It is possible that manna refers to the juice of the Tamarisk tree, which is eaten and then secreted by certain insects.

Perhaps that was the case, or perhaps not. In that case, however, every Israelite would have had to gather that manna from the ground almost all day long in order to get enough to eat for that one day. So **manna**, though it was “food from heaven”, yet, it was not a free lunch. But it **was sufficient, with effort, to sustain them on their journey to freedom**. In Jesus’ prayer that he gave us, “Give us this day our daily bread,” referred to the food which enabled the Jews to survive as a nation. That “miracle” was the meeting of grace, of faith, and of hard work.

In our Gospel reading from John 6, Jesus said that he would give to his followers bread not only for their survival, not only for a short term horizon, but rather into a much bigger horizon, into the ultimate freedom of eternal life. His audience was looking for a material miracle. They wanted something for nothing -- or even, for him to turn stones into bread, as the tempter had previously suggested. Jesus, however, specifically opposed the idea that this was tree bread, designed to cater for the lazy. **To follow Jesus was** the route to survival. Not only survival, however: it **was the route to things that last forever: true freedom; true love, and true life**.

We can consider another dimension of what this means. **You cannot follow Jesus as a single individual alone**. Following Jesus immediately entails being part of a group of people, the people of God. You may not like them. They may not like you. But to follow Jesus is to be an equal member with everyone else who follows Jesus. Perhaps someone will say, “I worship God (alone) in my garden.” Well, that is not Christianity. Among the people of God, each one an equal member with the next one, there must be justice. In every Holy Eucharist we read, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”**. Just as the dimension of freedom is not free of cost; so also this other dimension of following Jesus. So **a just and equal relation with one another, all of us, is both valuable, and costly**.

In the Gospel there is the question, “What is the work of God?” Jesus replied, “It is to believe in the one whom God sent (Jesus).” That does not mean that I can say, “I believe in Jesus,” and then carry on doing just what I did before. Think of **Wilberforce**. He **spent his whole life fighting for the repeal of slavery in the English Parliament. His whole life long! The repeal of slavery came only after the death of Wilberforce. To follow Jesus means to have your whole life spent in the service of Jesus**.

All these things are contained within the bread we ask for and receive in Holy Eucharist. There is the promise of freedom, love, justice, and commitment. All these come at a price. Our baptism reminds us that the price is everything.

Children (whether one is poor, or rich) cost everything. They also give you everything. So it is in following Jesus. **When we ask for and receive Jesus' body, the bread of eternal life, Jesus gives us everything that is worthwhile, now and into eternity. This also costs everything we have.**

We are considering **outreach through this Parish**. We have already thought about this a lot, and have discussed it together. Whatever we prayerfully do will bring promise, hope and fruit. **It is also going to be costly.**

There are no magic bullets by which people will flood in here. It will be just as it was for the Israelites in the wilderness, or as it was for the people of Capernaum.

**Jesus will lead us. Jesus will sustain us. There will be fruit. But the cost will be our wholehearted commitment.** We have to be ready to offer up our own lives.

In the name of Christ, Amen.