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The Passover and the Red Sea

Exodus 12:1–14:31 · Harvest · Adults

Every Easter Vigil, in the dark, the Church sings that this is the night God brought Israel through the sea, and then reads Exodus 14, a reading that may never be left out. The Passover is not only an old story. It is the pattern of salvation.

Context: Israel has been in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years and has been reduced to forced labor. An earlier Pharaoh ordered Hebrew baby boys drowned in the Nile (Ex 1:22). Moses, sent from the burning bush, has confronted Pharaoh through nine plagues. Pharaoh will not yield.

In Exodus 12 God gives the instructions that Jewish families still remember at every Seder. A year-old lamb without defect. Its blood on the doorposts and lintel. The meal eaten in a hurry by people dressed for the road, with unleavened bread because there is no time for dough to rise, and bitter herbs for the bitterness of slavery. The blood is a sign: God's judgment will pass over the marked homes. At midnight the firstborn of Egypt die, and Pharaoh at last drives Israel out. A vast company leaves, carrying Joseph's bones, guided by a pillar of cloud and fire.

At the sea, Pharaoh's chariots close in. The people do what frightened people do: they turn on their leader and wish they had stayed slaves. Moses answers that God himself is

about to act for them. God's reply is practical: get moving. The cloud moves behind them, a wind from the east blows all night, and Israel crosses on dry ground between walls of water. At dawn the sea returns over the pursuing army. Israel sees, fears the Lord and believes.

The Church's reading: Jesus celebrated his Last Supper within the Passover and gave it its definitive meaning; his death and Resurrection are the new Passover (CCC 1340). In the biblical sense of memorial, a past saving event becomes present; so the Eucharist makes present the one sacrifice of Christ (CCC 1363–1364). He is the Lamb whose blood marks us for life (Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7; CCC 608). The crossing prefigures baptism (1 Cor 10:1–2; CCC 1221).

Honest about the hard part: the death of Egypt's firstborn is grievous, and Scripture does not hide the grief. The Book of Wisdom reads it as judgment on a nation that had drowned Israel's sons (Wis 18:5), while insisting that God does not delight in death (Wis 1:13). The Gospel's answer is not an explanation but a gift: in the end, the Father offers his own firstborn Son for the world.

For adult life:

Most adults know some Egypt: an addiction, a debt, a job that consumes everything, a grief that will not lift. The Exodus says freedom is God's work, and it often begins with a very ordinary step forward.

Notice Israel's panic at the sea. Fear made them wish for the old slavery. Doubt and complaint are not the end of faith; the people still walked into the sea.

And the Passover was a family meal. Faith was handed on at the table, with questions from the children.

A real-life step: go to Mass this Sunday with the Passover in mind, and at the Lamb of God, name one slavery you want Christ to lead you out of. Consider the sacrament of Reconciliation as your first step.

Song of praise · Exodus 15:1–21

The Song of the Sea (Ex 15) is among the oldest hymns in Scripture: a people who did nothing to save themselves respond with pure praise. The Church reads the crossing as a figure of Baptism (CCC 1221) and sings this canticle at the Easter Vigil. Thanksgiving, not achievement, is the first word of the freed.

Church teaching note

Church teaching: the new Passover in Christ's death and Resurrection (CCC 1340); the Eucharist as memorial making the sacrifice present (CCC 1363–1364); Christ the Paschal Lamb (CCC 608); the Red Sea as a figure of baptism (CCC 1221). The Easter Vigil's Exodus 14 reading and its sung proclamation are liturgical Tradition (Roman Missal), not an explicit verse. Wisdom 18:5 and 1:13 are cited as Scripture (deuterocanonical).

Talk about it

1. What is one Egypt in your life, something that enslaves or exhausts you?
2. Israel panicked at the sea and still walked forward. What does that say about faith and fear?
3. How could your family table hand on faith the way the Passover meal did?
4. Catholic connection: read CCC 1340 and 1363–1364. How does this change the way you hear the Lamb of God at Mass?

Key verse: Ex 14:13. Look it up in your Bible.