

Sentence

Owe no one anything except to love one another. For whoever loves another has fulfilled the Law.

Romans 13:8

Collect

Almighty God You know us to beset in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our natures, we cannot always stand upright; grant to us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 12: 1 – 14

Psalm

149

Epistle

Romans 13: 1 – 10

GOSPEL

Matthew 18: 10 – 20

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

It is a fascinating exercise to stop and realize how many times we humans celebrate all manner of things, yet do it in remarkably similar ways. What celebration occurs at your place without a meal or a feast? Even when visitors call, it is a matter of a cuppa or a beer or something. Nothing significant occurs without it! And that is the way that it should be.

The Passover was very much the celebratory and preparatory meal before the whole tribe left the safety and settledness of Egypt, whatever the circumstances, to head out and beyond their comfort zone – for nothing much beneficial happens in life without stepping out into the dark somewhat. And Jewish people have been celebrating the Exodus every year since, which comes to something like 3,500 times now. (I think you might find that the Hebrew calendar is dated from this event.) It was and remains most formative for Israel.

And I doubt that I need to remind you that the Christian Eucharist, Mass, Communion, Lord's Supper has its roots exactly here. Just as God rescued Israel from certain extinction way back then, so the Eucharist points us to a similar yet far more wide-ranging rescue ... so ponder that a while, eh?

Psalm

So if you are to follow the direction in which the psalm points then get all excited about it. However it is important to notice that the understanding of God has grown a little since this psalm was written. No, you are not permitted to belt the living daylights out of your foes any more, though it seems that some Christians still retain that remarkably judgemental approach to those who do not see eye to eye.

Epistle

If you are game for it, there are some things about which Paul wrote and to which you need to acknowledge quite some development since. If that horrifies you, then simply read the rest of your New Testament to see how the Infant Church recognized, first, the modified value of the Empire. At least it was seen first as the instrument of God for keeping chaos at bay. On the other hand, John, in his Revelation, became singularly aware of the extent to which Caesar had stepped into the role of Divinity, demanding a loyalty which was way beyond him to demand or expect. *Never loose sight of the fact that the entire Bible is a diary of the way in which the People of God's understanding of God grew and evolved as time and circumstance made necessary and clear. Hebrew-Christian Faith is based on the developing understanding of life, relationships and God through the passage of time and vicissitudes of life.*

GOSPEL

Here is another rather fascinating cameo - fairly clearly a collection of sayings and comments by Jesus, focussing on a factor we moderns forget often. Is it not true that we tend to be so taken up with (even against, sometimes) the brouhaha and pressure of modern advertising. Push, push, push. However it is no evidence of past emphasis that had Jesus operating from the other end of the spectrum. It is never the Big Time aspects that win hearts: it is the gentle, genuine witness of the little people. It is never the *beau geste* that impacts on thinking people, but the simple and thoughtful giving of the individual.

Another rather interesting facet of this passage is the contrast from Old Testament practice, and still, I understand, current Jewish practice. There can be no *synagogue* (gathering) of the people unless there are twelve male adults available. Jesus took the unprecedented and unexpected action of reducing it to *two or three gathered in My Name*. Never overlook the fascinating changes instituted by our Lord: they tend to be very telling.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

One of the drums that I beat from time to time is to ask people to ponder awhile to see how much of our thinking and our values are drawn, not from the Faith, but from the culture to which we belong. This has ever been the case, and one of the sad illustrations in past history has been the way in which the great missionary *putsch* of several centuries ago operated on the presupposition that Western society was so superior that both the culture and the religion were to be imposed on a captive audience. If you think that I am being too hard, then look at the often drastic effect on our indigenous people here, even right up to about 40 years ago. (And I can offer some very telling illustrations of the damage!)

Part of this rather sad process comes from what amounts to cultural arrogance, for we assume without thinking that what we have is superior to anything else around the world. That assumption is made from a position of perceived strength, and like most assumptions, they "make an ass of you and me." Many countries do not want democracy, while we tend to see no other option. And it may surprise you to realize that democracy is not a Biblical imperative but an ancient Greek one. On top of that, our culture stresses the need, even demand, for personal wealth, and you are nobody if you are without it. In the meantime, the Biblical imperative, as in Acts for instance, is rather closer to what communism was actually designed to be: a sharing with all

Add to all this, is the remnant of the great Aussie bigotry about people of other colours, races and creeds. Certainly it is not as general as once was when I was young. Those days even Catholics were despised by 'Protestants,' and vice versa. That antagonism still shows up on occasion, in spite of the Biblical direction of loving one another.

And that is nowhere near the end of the differences between those who are meant to be of the Faith and those who are not. We are still human enough, it seems, to be attracted to power and control, and that in spite of the hideous outcomes of that path in recent and not-so-recent history.

All this adds up to the enormity of the challenge that these readings in particular, and the Gospel in general, present to the modern-day (*any-day!*) Christian. And that means we need to take off our blinkers and relate to the real world and to do so in a very positive and helpful way. So much of today's politics, in this country and overseas, presents itself as basically Christian (or at least its leaders do) whilst the reality is very different indeed. In fact, politics - in democracies at least, tends to be populist rather than Christian. The USA, for instance, has been professing a Christian approach to foreign policy, when in fact it has been not only far less than honest, but also violent in overtone and reality.

May I stick out my neck a moment: you do not have to believe me in this, but I do ask you to think. Last night (Feb 08) on Australian Story there was the story of the two young men who boarded a Japanese ship in the intention of trying to stop whaling. Whilst the aim and hope for the whales is perhaps to be applauded, surely the *modus operandi* was not. The action was nothing short of piracy, and as we used to be told when young, two wrongs never make one right. From my perspective, neither the Japanese whaling nor the act of piracy has any moral value. However, the resolution of the matter is far from easy, and no short cuts are going to accomplish the desired outcome. Rather more careful thought needs to go into the process. It is a bit like the tomorrow's Apology to Indigenous People. One suspects that whilst the Rudd Government is to be applauded for raising the issue, I have more than a sneaky suspicion that the proposed action may well raise more problems than it settles. Time will tell, no doubt, but there are far more angles and issues that require solution than people seem to realize.

Sunday 14th September, 2008

Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Sentence

If You, O Lord, should note what we do wrong, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, so that You may be revered.

Psalm 130: 3-4

Collect

O God, without You we are not able to please You: mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 14: 19 – 31

Psalm

114

Epistle

Romans 14:1-14

GOSPEL

Matthew 18: 21 – 35

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament Lesson

This would have to be one of the best-known of the Biblical stories, and is certainly one of the most formative events for Israel. It is not just a matter of rescue from slavery, but also from certain annihilation. God is a God Who saves, even when the chances of survival are zero. Subsequent Biblical history repeats the story, in Exile and Cross.

A couple of interesting factors may enhance your perception: it is not so much the ‘miracle’ of crossing the sea but moderns need to see that water of any expanse or sea is ‘translated’ as evil – and the overcoming of it, the defeat of evil. In this case it was Egyptian evil. Notice how often in Biblical imagery, OT and NT, the picture is reiterated, even to John in his *Revelation*. (*That sea of glass before the throne is – in John’s terms – the entire reservoir of human evil, and look where God is, in the imagery.*)

Rescue; salvation: in Old Testament terms, ‘salvation’ is always seen as ‘room to move, space to be oneself and one’s community,’ or later, wholeness.

Psalm

As if to underline the earlier comment, here is a huge liturgical celebration of that which lies at the heart of Jewish faith. Here is utter rejoicing, and if you dare, the delight in the God Who works in the lives of His people. Here is no cloud-cuckoo land faith, but one based on historical realities.

What ailed you, sea that you fled? Here is no strange comment, but the recognition that when God is seen as God, then human evil retreats. **Ponder that a moment eh?**

Epistle

It may look a little strange to have such a passage in the midst of the other readings, but it seems to me that when people get carried away because of what God has done for them, they get rather superior in the sense that they then go on to feel that other people are second- or third-class citizens. Here Paul is reminding people that the Faith (and the Lord behind it) does not allow for such judgementalism and isolation. Here is no easy path to travel, from where I sit, because there is still that rather strange fact that modern people in particular love to distort the Biblical faith --- sometimes in order to disqualify others. I find it hard not to suggest that such people look rather closer at the Faith, not to disqualify them but to give them room to move ahead into a broader vista of the Faith.

Gospel

Now here comes a real doozy! If there is one extraordinarily difficult aspect of the Christian Faith it is precisely this business of forgiveness. Jesus' vivid and powerful parable is of that rather unpleasant debtor who, forgiven of a huge debt, demands satisfaction of a very small one. Peter's question that raised the issue illustrates that Apostle's growth curve, for common perception those days was that three forgivenesses was a true way to go. Peter exceeded that number by more than twice! Jesus took that to the innumerable level, which has all sorts of problems apparently attached.

It may be worth pondering a moment, not so much to limit Jesus' challenge to us, but rather to see the process more clearly. If there is one thing that both Old Testament and New require of penitents is precisely that: **repentance**. And repentance is not simply the being sorry for what has been done, but it requires a rather more significant response from the penitent. You may well be aware of the fact that in the original Greek, the word translating *repent* is *metanoia*, *metanoia*. This word is all about change of mind, of heart, of direction. It is the recognition of the fault and sin and the need to ensure its non-recurrence. In other words, both the sinner and the sinned against need to face the reality of the failure. Here is no light-hearted wafting over the hurt and damage, but rather the facing of it by perpetrator **and** victim. This is hugely important to notice, and to act upon. There is no room for the old stereotype of confession to a priest and then going out and doing it all again. And it is certainly not the blasé 'forgive and forget.' Neither of those are forgiveness; it is sheer and utter mockery.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

It was only yesterday (as I type this) that the Prime Minister of this country led the Sorry Day, that time of expressing deep regret at so many of the past actions and misdeeds against indigenous people of this country. It was a profoundly moving event, with some backlash from both sides of the divide. In fact, I was at the local doctor's during the late morning, and an aboriginal man sat alongside of me, as I was waiting and doing crosswords. He was a dab hand at crosswords, as he looked over my shoulder and offered suggestions. I had the hide to ask him what his response was to the Sorry Day, and while he expressed hope for the future, he also indicated that the words needed to be followed by actions. He was no looking for compensation, but he was looking for **real and deep genuineness**.

One of the misapprehensions about forgiveness has long been that feeling that it was a simple, naïve and somewhat useless end to a feeble attempt to sweep things under the carpet. Cynicism has been the order of the day for many years. You may recall the cynicism against the Catholic practice of confession, with many non-Catholics fuming about having your sins forgiven one minute, and going out and doing it all again the next. Such a stereotyped view of anything does no one any great service, but I suspect that there was still the demeaning by some who simply went through the hoops. At any rate, the forgiveness thing has not had all that good press for a long time. Much of the reason for that has been the populist view that it didn't deal with the issues. And **that** is the issue.

One of the most stunning examples in recent decades has been the Reconciliation process in past-apartheid South Africa. After such a long period of depression and ugly misdealing with black Africans, and the demise of the official policy of Apartheid, one might have expected a violent reaction with roles reversed between oppressors and oppressed. That is the usual path of revolution, but that did not happen. The Reconciliation Process required those who took part in repressive and reactionary violence were required to own up to their evil misdeeds, and face the truth of their actions. What followed was not some punitive reaction, but the requirement also of what Christians call repentance, with the serious expectation that there would be no repeat of the ugliness.

In other words, forgiveness is not a one-sided activity, but requires a serious and lasting response from both parties. I recall quite some years ago, one of my colleagues' responses to the murder of one of his aged parishioners was to call on his flock to forgive the murderer. He went on TV and was quoted in the press, as he reiterated his call: this is what Jesus did, he would say, and that is required of us, too. I was appalled at his odd and misleading challenge, and wrote to him suggesting a deeper look at what he was saying. My letter was responded to with scorn and disbelief, but I can only hope that he has grown from then.

'Forgive and forget' is a mantra that so many once used, until the shallowness of it all became too much to bear. And there **is** a great deal more to the process, which we ignore to our peril, really. It is no error of judgement that has, in the Biblical scheme of things, a very close connection between repentance and forgiveness. Although these may not be linked verbally in every incident Biblically, the implication is there always and constantly. And repentance is no mere 'being sorry,' for, as in Anglican and other rites, both being sorry (and not just because one was caught out, but genuinely sorry for the damage done) **and** repenting is *de rigueur*. **Sorrow and repentance.**

It is interesting to note that the Greek word that translates repent is metanoia. Metanoia for the purists. And metanoia has to do with *change of mind, of heart and of direction*. If I repent of something I have done to you, then you can be more than reasonably assured that I will not re-offend. Before forgiveness can occur, both you need to be able to put what had been done behind you, and I need to be aware of the damage I had done, and need to reassure you of future certainty. In other words, **both parties to the conflict need to respond seriously to each other.**

Let me take you some steps further: if and when that process takes place, forgiveness is not a simple act soon done and over with. What the forgiving party does when such an offer is made is not a matter of *feeling forgiving*. If I forgive you for something, I let you know by that that I have refused my right to retaliate. So you can be sure of me, and I of you. And that may take a while to be realized.

Now all this may take some time to ponder, but I do ask you to see that – far too often indeed – what has been ‘sold’ as Divine forgiveness to many people is something far short of the reality. God does not take any of us lightly, nor does He fob us off with half-cocked and short-handed spirituality. He takes us most seriously indeed, as we ought to each other also.

Sunday 21st September, 2008

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Matthew's Day (not noted here)

Sentence

By grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God.

Ephesians 2:8

Collect

Loving Father, Whose Son, Jesus Christ, has taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do to also for Him; give us the will to be servants of others, as He is the Servant of all, Who gave up His life and died for us, and yet lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God now and for ever

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 16: 2 – 15

Psalm

105: 1 – 6 & 37 – 45

Epistle

Philippians 1: 21 – 30

GOSPEL

Matthew 20: 1 – 16

NOTES ON THE READINGS

There are several rather interesting and telling points about this rather familiar story. First there is that rather common human condition that complains at every turn of the road: suddenly the lousy slavery conditions under which they had lived with threat of extinction seemed preferable to wandering through the scrub towards freedom. Who would be a Moses, eh?

And then that business of the manna - and the fascinating turn of phrase because the Hebrew word 'manna' means 'what in the name of fortune is it?'

There is so much to ponder in this part of the tale: the feeding of the multitude through Moses, and the rather more effective yet similar ministry of our Lord. Nothing left over here; and bundles when Jesus offered similar treatment. And if you read John's story of the Feeding of the 5,000 one becomes surprised, does not one, when the clear and distinct connection between feeding and Eucharist should leave any one pondering it all, a little breathless. The imagery is astounding, and one needs to explore it. Even to 'what is it exactly?' being applied to 'This is My body.'

Surely there is enough here for many, many sermons.

Psalm

You will have noticed already, surely, how often the psalms are shouts of praise for the God Who does things in and through His people. We who are used to this somewhat need to be reminded that much of the 'theology' of people contemporary with Moses would have seen their religious duty in terms of finding ways to manipulate the gods into what the people wanted. Little or no morality and certainly no caring about other people were evident in contemporary religion, and the Israel experience was clearly way beyond where others were at. That did not make Israel superior, but it did provide them with a hugely valuable spring-board from which to leap. Sadly, there are few Abrahams around, then or now, who are prepared to step outside their comfort zone. They prefer God to be a comfort, a dummy, a place to hide from reality. God expects His people to be far more serious and significant than that!

Epistle

So here is another challenge. Dear old St. Paul had been through hell and high water at this stage in his life and ministry, and was clearly ready for a rest, a blow, a break. But like all the people of God, his *raison d'être* was, as always, the service of others. It may not be all that comfortable, but we are called to the same business as Jesus, of making the Father known, and that is best done, not with words but with the quiet reflection of His characteristics.

GOSPEL

What a complete and utter stirrer was this Lord of ours. What self-respecting unionist or even normal Aussie person would cop the astounding Work Place Agreement as this! Before anyone has apoplexy, it would be worth pondering a moment.

In a day of no basic awards, work was the real necessity for the continuation of life and family. No cash at the end of the day mean 'stiff cheese' for the next. Remember that petition in the Lord's Prayer: properly translated, the familiar 'give us today our daily bread' should read 'give us today our bread for tomorrow.' When a labourer was paid at the end of each day, he had enough for his family to survive the morrow. No more. And no pay meant no certainty for the morrow.

This surely brings a different light on the parable: the owner of the vineyard had concern that all who worked for him had a certain tomorrow. And that is stunning stuff. On the other hand, no one had, to quote an ancient film star, any mortgage on the day after tomorrow. That was always in the arena of faith.

Notice if you dare how far we have wandered from trust for the future where we mortgage today in order to be sure of tomorrows, not matter how many or how few.

It is all a little difficult to come to terms with such a radical approach.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

'Religion and politics do not mix,' so goes the popular saying, but little could be further from the truth. In fact every time there is a letter to the editor complaining about Christians being off with the fairies, my pen-hand gets so very itchy. It makes me feel like Richard Morris used to feel.

It takes not the greatest reading of the Scripture, Old Testament in particular, to make an observation about 'religion' that indicated the vast difference between religions contemporary to Old Testament Judaism and the Jews. Whereas contemporary religion had more to do with compelling the gods to do what the supplicant wanted, regardless of the moral outcomes of those demands, the Hebrew faith was far more solid and grounded in human relationships and the needs of each other. Just check out the writings of Amos for instance and other manor prophets. If there is one drum that those ancients belted it was one of justice. There was no room in Amos' thoughts, for the faithful Jew to live it up at the cost of poorer fellows; and the perceived outcome was that such injustices not only brought down the unjust, but the entire nature and community. In other words, so much of the impact of Christianity (and Judaism if you dare!) really has to do with the need to value each human being as part of the community. And that leaves little room for some being superior and others being inferior.

In fact religion and politics will often collide, as in the fascinating and sometimes hotly disputed parable from the lips of our Lord. Can you begin to imagine any hot-blooded unionist having anything to do with the *modus operandi* pictured here? Someone at the end of the day receiving the same as those who 'bore the heat and burden of the day?' It would be enough to bring the entire workforce out on strike. And in some way, that should perhaps occur. Until, of course, the wider perspective was taken into account.

Do not imagine that parables are designed to have every little jot and tittle paralleled. The picture is of the way in which the particular needs of the individual need to be taken into account, or to see the utter generosity of God in life. Each of the families represented by those workers had the same need for some sense of security for the next day. 'Give us today our daily bread' was properly translated some years ago as 'give us today our bread for the morrow.' In other words, in the culture where day labourers were paid at the end of each day, that process ensured that their respective families had enough to see them through the next day. The fact that they then had to trust God for the time after that was yet another expression of everyone's equality.

So the reasoning behind this most remarkable of parables was the need to 'share with justice the resources of the earth,' as our Prayer Book intercessions express it. And that, surely, is where our present culture and country loses touch with the reality of justice. It is a gap that has been widening ever since the Industrial Revolution, and remains one of the huge points of divergence in both world and local politics.

There is insufficient space here to work towards a significant answer to the vast issues of life and history. But it is the recognition that the Faith once delivered has to do with issues fare more immediate and relevant than the number of angels on the point of a pin. Or even about who gets to heaven!

If there is one thing that marks the point at which my pilgrimage in the Faith reached an indelible turning point it is when I began to discover that the Authorised Version's translation as 'righteousness' was not a focus on my terribly human capacity to be sinful, but that the word is better translated '**justice.**' **In other words, 'religion' and politics are inseparable.**

Sunday 28th September, 2008

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

Sentence

Come let us return to the Lord that we may live before Him.

Hosea 6:1

Collect

O God, You declare Your mighty power chiefly in showing mercy and pity: mercifully grant us such a measure of Your grace that, running the way of Your commandments, we may obtain Your gracious promises and be made partakers of Your heavenly treasure, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Old Testament Lesson

Exodus 17: 1 – 7

Psalm

78: 1 – 4 & 11 – 16

Epistle

Philippians 2: 1 – 13

GOSPEL

Matthew 21: 23 – 32

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Old Testament

Unless you have had some experience with perverse members of a congregation (or maybe even a perverse congregation) you may be rather surprised at the rather unpleasant behaviour of those ancient Israelites. On the one hand, the misery is understandable, on the other, it must have been a load for poor old Moses to carry. Massah and Meribah – you can almost taste it! And you will recall that Psalm 95 brings it all back – as a choir boy in my youth, I sang that *Venite* every Sunday morning for many years. It was a constant reminder to be grateful for whatever you had. (I am sorry that this Psalm was not set for today, actually, though it would have been a little repetitive to do so.)

Psalm

If there is one thing that I recall from Old Testament studies when I was in College, it was the emphasis expressed then on Israel's capacity to *murmur against the Lord*. It struck me then as a little strange, but whenever I have encountered it in parish life, those old memories returned. How gut-tearing it is when someone 'murmurs,' for it tends to be non-specific and so difficult to pin down, to fix or counteract. It is always the anonymous '*they*' who make the kerfuffle, never someone to whom you can speak and discuss. The human reaction (or is it just mine?) is to blow up and demand a bit more maturity from the miscreants. Sometimes that works, but it still does not reflect the patient characteristic of the Father. *Mind you, that murmuring capability does reflect the character of said destructive miscreants.*

Epistle

Why is it in this period of Generations X and Y that so much of Scripture goes past the ears of ambitious and active young people? This is a hugely significant part of Holy Writ, and needs careful attention every time Philippians 2 comes up for attention.

This is one of the earliest Christian hymns, according to some commentators, which is why it tends to be printed in inverted commas. And it also underlines some of the vastly important New Testament theology, and very down-to-earth stuff at that.

Here, if you will simply read the fine print for a moment or two, you have the direct and powerful contrast between the **Jesus way** and the *Adam way*. Who was it that demanded equality with God, and went on to discover the utterly destructive nature of operating that way? Here really is the Gospel in a nut-shell, Adam versus Jesus. Generation X & Y versus being servants of each other. It is not about heaven: it is about the redemption of the world, **now. Here and now.**

And going back to that 'reflection of the Father's character,' this is why Jesus operated the way He did, and this is why the Gospel offers a totally different, effective and conciliatory way of life for all humans of all races and creeds. This is explosive stuff. And remarkably few teachers or people even refer to it.

Gospel

This rather stunning cameo reaches to the very heart of things, in a manner very similar to all of today's readings. Look past the surface, get in touch with the realities, *and respond to them*. In the first instance, there is a constant battle Jesus had against those who set up their defences behind the lines of dogma and tenet, and refused to face truth and reality. That position taken so bitterly is a clear and painful illustration of 'religion,' and is precisely that which Jesus came to uncover and change. In the real world, how stupid and shallow were those of our Lord's antagonists! Even the nature of their discussion of how to respond must surely have shown up to themselves the total dishonesty of their planned approach.

Similar dishonesty was shown by the two sons, although the choice of the latter one underlines the way in which truth can work its way in an honest person. Oddly enough, there is not any great need for deep searching to discover where truth lies. The real problem is in facing it and responding to it honestly.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

It was a gathering of local clergy in organising and arranging their common ministry to a local institution, and we were trying to find ways in which to work our way quietly and effectively in order to get past the same perversity in that situation that has been illustrated in several of today's readings. The more we pondered the situation, the more the really quite stupid reality often illustrated by a number of levels of bureaucratic mismanagement showed up. In fact, so much of governmental stuff in this day and age is shot through with spin, avoidance of responsibility and sheer stupidity. One is often left in the situation that answers to questions or requests for sensible responses are impossible to receive, so that one is left with the perception that either one is dealing with idiots, or those with whom you are trying to deal are treating you as dolts. It can only be that one's respondents are defending what they know to be indefensible.

I guess that there is some sort of relief in knowing that our Lord encountered the same sort of culpable refusal of truth and reality. But that strange method of avoidance of action by people needs to be seen for what it is. So when we see Jesus faced with this inanity, and watch His response to it, then no room for doubt is left in wondering why that gentle, servant Lord of ours ruffled the feathers of the powers that were then.

From there it is a small step to see that 'religion,' as some people like to define it, or certainly as Jesus offered it to His world and ours, is no snivelling escapism from life's harsh realities. It is rather a matter of facing the injustices by those in power and looking for and pressing towards a far more fair way forward.

It is not only the powerful who indulge in such behaviour. Just as Moses had that rather pathetic lot in the desert, so we too find similar demanding, irresponsible people on occasion. And whilst we may have no great rods to strike the rocks to provide water, there will often be a means of resolution of the issues that do not call for greater injustice to resolve. To get to such a position may well require a lot of thought and prayer, a great deal of wisdom and insight, and not a little forethought as well. But it can be done.

As I write this, the great Australian Sorry Day is just a few days ago, and we find ourselves picking up the mistakes of the past and trying to do something about it. It is not the only instance of looking for answers to great issues back then, and going along a path of what seemed to be the best or easiest way out of the morass. Many of us older ones will recall the process that was followed when girls became pregnant before marriage, and a solution was acted on to deal with the issue. I recall with horror, looking back, at being party to the removal of a young pregnant lass to a home in Adelaide for such people. Adoption was the course of action, and seemed the best solution at the time, but it was not long before those young mothers found it hideously impossible to cope with the outcome. Little or no thought was given to the young mothers' maternal instincts, and even less to the young lads who shared in the deed. How many of you have been in this position, how many have experienced the heartburn or separation from your child and how many suffered the ghastly business of wondering how the infant was getting on, or had enormous difficulty trying to make contact later? And we have not even touched, yet, upon the trauma for the separated little one. *There had to be a better way, though these days it seems that no one expects responsible actions from parent, child or government. We have moved to the opposite extreme, which tends to be the outcome when one path of action is considered draconian.*

SPECIAL NOTE OF SOME DISAPPOINTMENT

Or Why did the Lectionary omit Exodus 19 – hugely important stuff

Exodus 19: 1 – 9a

In the third month after Israel had left Egypt, they came to the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and, entering the wilderness of Sinai, they encamped there, pitching their tents in front of the moun-

tain. Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: *You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I have carried you on eagles' wings and brought you here to me. If only you will now listen to me and keep my covenant, then out of all peoples you will become my special possession; for the whole earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation.* Those are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Moses went down, and summoning the elders of the people he set before them all these commands which the Lord had laid on him. As one the people answered, "Whatever the Lord has said we shall do." When Moses brought this answer back to the Lord, the Lord said to him, "I am coming to you in a thick cloud, so that I may speak to you in the hearing of the people, and so their faith in you may never fail."

It may not be well-known that the Ten Commandments form just a part of the Covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai. In fact the Covenant stretches from the start of Chapter 19 until well past Chapter 20 and it all requires attention even for the modern Christian.

The reason for this comment here is especially because of the underlined and italic section above, which, whilst the original may not be well known to you, should be in fact as the words are reiterated elsewhere in Scripture and constantly in the Consecration Prayers in the Eucharist. This fact has been a constant for centuries.

The most powerful reason for bringing this to your attention is to see that 'kingdom of priests and holy nation' makes it quite clear that, even at Sinai the role of Israel was always to be evangelistic in the proper sense of the word. In other words, the reason for Israel's existence (and thus the Church's) is to be that 'light to the nations' helping others to see where truth lies in the matter of human reason for existence. This Hebrew-Christian Faith was designed from the start to be **outward-looking**, and not introverted and 'religious.' You will notice from both Jewish and Church history that whenever people became introverted in their faith, neither group were being what they were intended to be.

Kingdom of priests: no one can ever be a priest to themselves. I can only ever be priest when there is someone else to whom to be priest!

Rather more likely to be one of the lakes there, the Reed Lake, than the Red Sea.

As mentioned before, I have great difficulty with the word 'religion.' It implies something that Christianity is not. Here is no 'ou dreamtime stuff. Here is the facing of harsh reality and offering significant alternatives.

And you will note that there is another form of the Decalogue in Deuteronomy. Please look that up for yourself.

And think about the promise and challenge to Abram!