

3rd Sunday of Lent (C)  
(Exodus 3:1-8.13-15 / Luke 13:1-9)  
24.03.2019  
*Freedom*

The Lord said, "I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers."

The people of Israel was acutely aware of its need to be freed from slavery and of the fact that God was the only one able to help them achieve this end.

Many centuries later, fundamentally the situation has not changed that much. We are facing the same challenges the people of Israel faced. Firstly we have to be aware that we are enslaved in one way or another. Secondly we need to believe and to trust that God will help us.

Here it is hard not to see a parallel between the biblical demarche and the first two steps of the Twelve-step recovery program: first the admission that there is a problem and then the belief that a greater power can and will do something about it.

During our Lenten journey, we are encouraged to look at what is amiss in our lives, we are supposed to be aware of and name the slave-drivers which make us relate to God, to others and to ourselves in unbalanced and unhealthy ways.

There is a syndrome called the "Stockholm syndrome". It is a psychological condition that causes hostages to develop an alliance with their captors. The hostages defend their captors and refuse to cooperate with the police forces.

I think that very often we develop a kind "Stockholm syndrome" in regard to our slave-drivers, whether they are our inner thoughts, habits, circumstances or the people around us. We become reluctant to see and to deal with their real impact upon our lives, with their crippling effects upon our freedom and ability to move on.

It is absolutely necessary for us to identify the structures of oppression in our lives and in society.

Fears, thoughts, addictions to drugs, money, sex, food, alcohol, refusals to forgive, our desire to control everything and everyone have all to be brought to light and named. This is the first step on the path of freedom. This is the best way to turn the tables on our slave-drivers and to initiate a change in our situation of enslavement.

We must here also remember that in September 2017, the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that 24.9 million men, women, and children were victims of human trafficking around the globe.

Whether we consider our personal inner lives or what is happening to so many of our brothers and sisters in humanity, the lesson we can draw from the book of Exodus is that, like the people of Israel, we should cry out to God. We should speak about what is happening with our God and with one another. We must call for help.

Silence born out of fear, complacency, laziness, indifference strengthens all forms of slavery. It is in the dark corners of our hearts and of our society that slave-drivers prosper, grow in influence, and hold us under their sway.

This Lenten season is a time for us to appeal to God and to others for help, to bring to light what is preventing us from walking freely, to name what holds us captive.

In our Catholic tradition, the Sacrament of reconciliation is about healing and liberation. When we go to a priest in order to confess our sins, there is more than just acknowledging that we have eaten sweets or missed Mass because we were sick or forgot to

say some prayers. Let us go deeper and, with God's grace, let us work at flushing out the slave-drivers from wherever they may be hiding themselves in the recesses of our hearts or in the structures of our society.

“The Lord said, ‘I have heard their appeal to be free of their slave-drivers. I mean to deliver them’.”