

“Let there be light” and there was light. God speaks and his Word is power, irresistible. God created *ex nihilo*, say the theologians, “out of nothing”. The Bible begs to differ. In that great poem-prayer that opens the Hebrew Scriptures we hear, “In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth then was welter and water and darkness over the deep and God's *ruah* (breath, life-force, spirit) hovering over the waters, God said....” [Robert Alter's translation]. God's light illuminated the darkness of the watery waste that was there. The ancient mind, however imaginative, could not conceive of utter nothingness.

God's creative process was a series of separations. Separating the waters above from the waters below; dividing the waters below to let dry land appear and thus bringing order to chaos. But the waters could always flow back and restore chaotic emptiness as they did when the flood destroyed the wickedness, another form of chaos, that was prevalent across all the earth.

The waters were a symbol for evil, an ever threatening malevolence. Within lurked monsters, including the great Leviathan; from across the seas came the terrors of marauding pirates seeking booty which included human cargo to sell as slaves, a truly dreadful prospect; and armies were no better.

The Hebrew Bible repeatedly asserts the power of God over the seas. The psalmist praises God who rebuked the seas that stood higher than the mountains which take flight at the sound of God's thunder (Psalm, 104 5-7) And thinks of the sea monsters as play-mates for God as a child might chase a puppy (Ps 104, 25-26). In the Book of Job God Himself asks the hapless sufferer, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Who shut the sea with doors when it burst from its womb?...Have you entered into the springs of the sea, or walked in the recesses of the deep?”

We should not be surprised when the great act of liberation, when God led his people out of slavery and towards the Land of Promise, they passed through the sea dry shod, the waters parting at God's command.

Jesus' power over the seas and storms is clear evidence that he acts as only God can act. Who is this? The troubled disciples ask. The power of the word should be their answer.

And so when we turn to the great vision of heaven from the great visionary, John the exiled prophet of Patmos, we are not surprised to be told that in the New Jerusalem, new minted from heaven, as beautiful as a bride dressed for her wedding, where God lives among his people, there is no sea. Sea represents chaos, the dark-side, sin and wickedness. All have been banished. Dragon and beasts have been destroyed. God is

all-in-all. Even salt-tears have no place for there is no more mourning.

When the priest holds us the sacred host, Christ's body broken and glorified, and holds up the chalice filled with consecrated wine, Christ's blood poured out for us, he says "Behold the Lamb of God" echoing the words of John the Baptist; and goes on "Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb". The Lamb is Jesus, the one proclaimed by the Baptist who takes away our sins by his death on the cross, condemned by Pilate at noon, when the slaughter of the Passover lambs was begun in the Temple; but the image has subtly changed. The Lamb to whose supper we are invited is the Lamb of Revelation; the Lamb to be wedded to the New Jerusalem, the Church. We are called to the wedding-feast of the Lamb but the translators changed from a literal rendering of the Apocalypse text. This is the Lamb who has the courage of a lion, as triumphant as a son of David, but who wins the victory by being a lamb slaughtered.

The invitation to receive the body and blood of Christ is an invitation here, now, to the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven, where there is no sea, no sin.

How much does that matter to us? How much would we miss the Eucharist if it were not available to us?

In 304CE in north Africa a group of Christians were meeting for Eucharist and were all arrested. Taking part in such an action was a capital crime. The owner of the house, a man called Emeritus was questioned. Why had he allowed a criminal action to take place in his home. "These are my brothers and sisters", he replied. "But now you will all die?" he was told. "*Quoniam sine dominico non possumus,*" was his answer. "We cannot live without the Lord (or the Lord's day, meaning the Eucharist)".

Last week we heard from Bishop Ralph that changes must take place and there must be some movement of resources to the centre and not a thin spread across everywhere. What this means in practice has yet to be worked out. But I have heard people get very angry about the possibility of their church, their parish, their mass falling away. Charity, a sense of fraternity to a wider community of faith, a sense of reality all lost.

What does the Eucharist mean to us? How much do we value it? What will we endure, what inconveniences will we put up with to hear the invitation to feast with the Lamb?

The Book of Revelation was written because of persecution and the fear of persecution. The first reading told us of the trials and tribulations the apostles happily endured as a necessity to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The brothers and sisters of Emeritus were martyrs, because they could not live without the Lord. Could we?

Stormy seas threaten to overwhelm us. How can we live without the Lord?