

## CHRISTMAS -6

"Lord God our redeemer, who heard the cry of your people and sent your servant Moses to lead them out of slavery: free us from the tyranny of sin and death, and, by the leading of your Spirit, bring us to our promised land; through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Collect).

Our collect for today is full of action words. It contains five verbs - five words of action - hearing, sending, leading, freeing and bringing. It highlights the active character of Christian ministry - Christian discipleship. God is a God of action - we his people are called to be an active people. The Church of Christ is meant to be a militant pressure group acting on the world around us. We used to pray in the words of the 1662 prayerbook - "Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church militant here in earth."

When Moses met the angel of the Lord on the mountain of Horeb the first thing that happened was that Moses was made aware of the holiness of God - "take off your shoes" said the Lord "for you are standing on Holy ground". But this vision of holiness was then immediately followed by a command to get up and do something. God said, "Go to Pharaoh and liberate my people". Moses naturally reacted by claiming that he wasn't up to it. He had a stutter - that was his cop-out. But God assured him of a sign - to give him some self-confidence - to give him some proof that he was doing God's will. That must have perked him up a bit - unfortunately however the sign was not to be given until after the command had been carried out - "when you have brought my people out of Egypt, you shall receive a sign". This was not really a confidence booster - we like to have signs

at the beginning of a journey rather than at the end. Like the tourist in Ireland who asked an Irishman the way to Galway Bay. He was told "If I was going to Galway Bay I wouldn't start from here". However that seems to be the way God works with us. He told Abraham to leave the security of his homeland and to go out and seek the promised land - but he gave him no directions. We, like Abraham and Moses have to live by faith and to trust in the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The Galileans experienced a similar sense of uncertainty on the morning after the feeding of the five thousand - the morning after the party is often a confusing time. "What must we do?" they asked. "What must we do if we are to work as God would have us work?" To which Jesus replies "This is the work that God requires of you:: believe in the one whom he has sent. "Yes" they said, "but what about a sign - give us a sign". They didn't understand that they were experiencing something new, something different - they thought that the feeding miracle was simply a repetition of Moses' feeding of the people in the wilderness many centuries before. Like most people they supposed that their real needs as human beings were limited to their physical requirements. They were delighted that Jesus could produce all that cheap food. They hoped that he would become their King and great provider.

They hadn't reached stage one of the Christian faith - that stage of dissatisfaction with their spiritual condition. They had no real hunger - no real hunger for God. Hadn't Jesus told them that it was the blessed who knew their need of God? But without an awareness of the holiness of God; without an awareness of the need to

be fed by God they had not really began to fire on all cylinders. We were designed to fire on three cylinders - body, mind and spirit. They were content to work with the first two. Jesus comes to us that we might have life in all its abundance - in body, mind and spirit.

"In truth, in very truth I tell you", he said, "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood you can have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood possesses eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. My flesh is real food, my blood is real drink."

God makes himself known to us in the breaking of bread - we, as we approach the blessed sacrament are on Holy ground. But like Moses received his marching orders, we too are called to service of some kind as part of the Church militant on earth. We pray, 'send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory'. We are not allowed to be passive observers of the growth of the kingdom of God. We are called to be carriers of the good news. Like Moses we feel unworthy - even unskilled. We seek for a sign before we act. We would prefer to be one of the crowd at a football match - not one of the players.

But we will not enter the promised land until we start taking some risks - some steps of faith. We will not experience the presence of the living holy God in our lives until we start doing the will of God our Father. You don't know if God has given you the gift of healing until you start the work of praying for the sick and visiting them in their time of need. You don't know if God has given you the gift of teaching until you start with trembling uncertainty to explain the faith which is within you.

The promised land - eternal life - the kingdom of heaven - describe the same thing. To enter into eternal life is to do the work of the kingdom - the healing, the teaching, the caring, the leading and the serving. It is essentially practical and experimental. You may fall flat on your face in the attempt at times - but God himself is your keeper. He will not forsake you. He will be with you always - yes, even to the end of time.

**AMEN**