

**YEAR OF FAITH
LENT & EASTER REFLECTION**

It is said that you cannot know a people unless you know their story – who they are, where they came from, what stories they tell of themselves.

Lent, as the season of preparation for Easter, is the time when Christians tell their story and remember who they are. During the six Sundays of Lent we remember pivotal Judeo-Christian events from the very beginning. This is an ancient directive: in the first reading of the first Sunday of Lent, we hear Moses exhorting his people to tell their own story as the people of God. His direction is clear – they must tell this story every year at harvest time because it tells of the essence of their relationship with God (Deut 26:1-11). And so they begin:

My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation ... But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer ... Then we cried out to the Lord [who] heard our voice and saw our misery ... [and] brought us out of Egypt ... to a land flowing with milk and honey. (NIV: Deut 26:5-11)

The Sundays in Lent successively tells the story of how ‘a wandering Aramean’ became the people of Israel. We will hear for instance of the faithful relationship between God and Abram (Abraham) and God’s call to Moses (the descendant of Abraham) to rescue his people from the Egyptians and lead them to freedom in the Promised Land. We will also hear of the Passover celebration – the fundamental ritual that celebrates these events.

By reminding ourselves of who we are and where we have come from, we are reminding ourselves of God’s relationship with us. From the beginning, God has maintained a continuing presence and care for the people of Israel and now for us. We in turn ‘shall rejoice in all the good which the Lord your God has given you and your household’. (Deut 26:11)

The Lenten season allows us to trace our deep roots as Judeo-Christians. In the Christian tradition, the stories of the Hebrew Scriptures all point towards one defining moment – the coming of the Messiah. For Christians, the coming of the Messiah is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Successive Gospel readings over the Sundays of Lent tell of the pivotal events in the public ministry of Jesus. Beginning with his temptation in the desert, they take us through to his passion and death during the Triduum (Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday). They conclude on Easter Sunday with his resurrection.

Easter is the high point of the Church calendar. It is the most significant feast in the liturgical year. The Paschal Mystery, a term which refers to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, goes to the heart of our faith. Although subject to a terrible death, Jesus rises again, bringing new hope to the world and to all of life, including our own. The resurrection leads us to believe that through Jesus, God's love conquered death. Love is stronger than death. The last word isn't suffering, death, despair and loneliness. There is always hope.

Judeo-Christian history tells of God's unending love. God maintained a constant presence of love and care over the people of Israel and still does for us today. That love reached new heights and depths in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This experience of love can give us the strength and power to resist corrosive forces in our culture. It can help us to deal with setbacks, cutbacks, dips and troughs. In an Ireland where almost no family is untouched by the harsh economic climate, our story is still one of hope. Our God is a God of love.

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