



*A brother came to the desert  
to visit Abba Moses  
and asked him for a word.  
The old man said to him:  
“Go, sit in your cell,  
and your cell will teach you everything.”*

*—From the Desert Fathers and Mothers*

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST 13 September 2020

### Invitation to Prayer—Psalm 105

Give thanks to God;  
make known God's wondrous deeds.  
Sing to God, sing praise for all that has been.

### Opening Prayer

I quieten down my body and mind  
and find you waiting for me  
in the cell of my heart.  
This is not a lonely place—  
cold walls of unrelenting isolation—  
but an encounter with  
the light of your love  
always burning  
in me  
and all that is.

Assured by your welcome,  
I will stay here. I will not flee.  
Help me abide with you  
as you abide with me.  
Transform me  
with your spirit of truth I pray.  
Amen.

## Scripture Reading—Exodus 16:2–15

*So far, we have explored three themes in the journey towards freedom, love and life. First, we do not make the journey alone. Second, our ongoing growth in faith depends upon our turning aside and looking closely at experiences that can illuminate God and God's call on our lives. Third, we are invited to attend well to threshold moments, in particular with pause and the gifts that come in our waiting and silence.*

*Now we enter the wilderness proper. The people will spend forty-years here, relinquishing their old ways and learning new ones. As you prepare to read, bring to mind seasons of change and transformation in your life. What was the experience like for you? What were the challenges? How did you react and respond? See if you recognise yourself in today's reading from Exodus.*

The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."

Then the LORD said to Moses, "I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days."

So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, "In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?"

And Moses said, "When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has

heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD."

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud.

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.'"

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat."

## Going Deeper

Each of us will have our own unique responses when pushed to the limits—both by real wilderness and those wilderness-like seasons in life that test us. The Hebrew people react with blame and complaint:

- What are your various responses to the challenges that come your way?
- What do you notice to be the positives and negatives of this mode of operation?
- Is there a more lifegiving way on offer at this time?

God addresses the hunger of the people not by giving them what they *want*, but by giving them gifts that have the potential to *build up their faith and trust*.

- When has God responded to your needs in a surprising way?
- How did it give shape to your faith?

Wilderness can be literal or metaphorical such as an event that takes us into unknown and challenging territory. The pandemic has cast us into a wilderness which, along with the difficulties, has the potential to bring insight and transformation.

- What wisdom have you gleaned during this time in the pandemic wilderness?
- What is helping you to integrate this wisdom into the whole of your life?
- Are you making any changes? If so, what has this been like for you?

### Reflection and Silent Meditation—from the World Community for Christian Meditation

*You might read the written reflection on Exodus for today  
then spend some time in silence, soaking in God's love.*

To meditate, sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase, "Ma-ra-na-tha." Say it as four syllables of equal length.

Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything—spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning simply to saying the word.

## **Prayers of Intercession**

*"We entreat you, make us truly alive."  
(from a forth century Eucharistic prayer)*

Loving God, as your creation slowly emerges from winter's dark rest, we pray that your realm of love might display a fresh greening in us and in the world. Weed from our hearts disordered affections and heal our wounds so we can bear more compassion, justice, and peace for your sake. We entreat you, O God, *make us truly alive.*

We pray for our future. Much is uncertain and the air is often filled with the noise of fear, disagreement and speculation. Help us to trust that, in you, all will be well. Bring us your peace. We entreat you, O God, *make us truly alive.*

Give your loving kindness to those who are forgotten and dismissed in our world. Shine your light on those who are neglected, we pray, hidden in the corners by ignorance or indifference. Fill us with your Spirit of compassion and courage. We entreat you, O God, *make us truly alive.*

We bring to mind people and situations who weigh heavy on our souls... We release each person and circumstance into your good care. Show us how to be your hands and heart in this world. We entreat you, O God, *make us truly alive.*

## **Disciples' Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,  
    your kingdom come,  
    your will be done,  
    on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins  
    as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial  
    and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours,  
    now and forever. Amen.

## **Blessing**

Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, "Abba, as much as I am able I practice a small rule, a little fasting, some prayer and meditation, and remain quiet and as much as possible I keep my thoughts clean. What else should I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands towards heaven, and his fingers became like ten torches of flame and he said to him, "If you wish, you can become all flame."

The love of God, the grace of Jesus Christ and the communion of the Spirit be with us all.