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I WILL REDEEM YOU WITH MY OUTSTRETCHED ARM (Ex 6:6)

We are a redeemed people. What does that mean? St. Paul tells us “all have sinned” but at once Paul adds that without any deserving on our part “all are now justified by the gift of God through the redemption accomplished in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23,24). We have a redeemer who does not free us just once but redeems us throughout our lives.

In the Old Testament, two words are used for redemption. One denotes buying someone out of slavery, a transaction with a commercial basis. A second term is based on family relationships and has a broader scope. A relative is redeemed or property is bought back from an alien possessor. An inheritance could be involved. Its meaning also includes the release of a person from a situation of deep distress. All these characteristics of redemption enter into the mystery of Christ. We are freed from the consequences of a primal transgression. Our inheritance is restored. Human suffering takes on a new dimension in Jesus. “He came and announced the good news of peace to you who were far off, and to those who were near.” (Eph 2:17)

The Exodus from Egypt is for the Jews the movement out of servitude to freedom. “For you are a people sacred to the Lord your God...chosen to be a people especially God’s own. Because the Lord loved you, God brought you out with a strong hand from the place of slavery” (Dt 7:6,8). This release of the Jewish people from bondage points ahead to what Jesus would accomplish on a far wider scale. His redemption would be for all inhabitants of the earth. The passage through the wilderness took 40 years. The passage of Jesus on our planet was completed in 33 years. Every event of His Incarnation carries with it the efficacy of redeeming love.

The incidents we read in the Gospels that tell of Christ’s ministry-- His reaching out to the needy, His healing of the sick, the blind and the disabled, His contact with those the Jews despised-- are all included within the mystery of the redemption. They reach their climax in Jesus’ dying and rising from the dead, the whole Paschal sequence.

In mistaken anguish, His disciples saw the crucifixion as the destruction of all they had counted on. Feeling desperate and forsaken, they walked with heads bowed down in grief. It was over. Everything they had set their hearts on. We can identify with that.

In our own lives, we often see darkness move in where before light gave warmth and illumination. A bleakness overtakes our spirit. What once invited us forward crumbles at our feet. We have our own hours on Calvary. Our cross stands on the peak of the hill with Christ’s and we can even be angry with God because we have been brought there. Or perhaps like the Good Thief we admit that we are not sinless and say his words, “Jesus, remember me.” (Lk 23:42). Whatever load of guilt we may carry, we turn to Him Who died for us sinners and we repeat, “Jesus, remember me.” We ask to be released, to know

the strength of Christ's mercy giving us new moral freedom. "It was for liberty that Christ freed us. So stand firm, and do not take on yourselves the yoke of slavery again" (Gal 5:1). Especially if we are bound by a habit which locks us into a way of functioning that readily leads into wrongdoing, we implore the assistance of His liberating love. "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer. I teach you what is for your good, and lead you on the way you should go" (Is 48:17).

All that took place from Good Friday to Easter morning occurred in the passing instances of time. But the redeeming power of Christ's mystery could not be held in by temporal boundaries. The whole drama of earthly history is touched by the eternal One Who has been sent to us. Past, present and future are gathered into a unity, blessed by the timeless love of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Redemption is the work of all Three Persons. The Word, going forth from the Father in the power of the Spirit, speaks to us now in human language as our Savior.

We call out to divine compassion when sin and evil try to dominate our global world or the smaller world we inhabit. So much blood, innocent and not-so-innocent, is being shed today. The helpless and homeless sob from wounds inflicted without pity. Who hears their groaning? Christ, Who was Himself wounded. To those who cry to Him, His answer is still, "You will be with me in Paradise" For the Good Thief, the time was "this day" (Lk 23:43). For all of us who still remain alive on earth, this day is not yet here. But the ongoing power of Christ's redemption touches us at each moment, offering us true freedom. Turning to Him, we have Jesus' assurance, "**You will be with me in Paradise.**"

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