

Lesson-2

CHURCH: THE COMMUNITY OF THE REDEEMED



God sent Moses and Aaron to liberate the people of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. They went to the Pharaoh and said: **“Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, 'Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’”** (Ex. 5:1). But, Pharaoh did not allow the Israelites to go. So God sent nine calamities upon the Egyptians one after the other. After each calamity, Pharaoh would call Moses and request him to revoke it. But when revoked,

Pharaoh changed his mind and refused to let the Israelites go. Therefore God decided to slay all the firstborns of the Egyptians, both man and beast, beginning with the house of the Pharaoh himself.

As the Lord commanded, they killed the Passover lamb and took some of its blood and put it on the two door ports and the lintel of the house. That night the destroyer passed through Egypt killing the first-born of both men and beast. A great cry arose from the house of Pharaoh and the whole of Egypt as there was not a single house where one was not dead. **But God protected the houses of the Israelites. In the same night,**

Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and told them: “Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites!; Go, worship the Lord, as you said.” (Ex. 12:31). The Israelites left Egypt the same night.

Thus the people of Israel were freed from their slavery in Egypt. From slavery, they were led to an experience of freedom and salvation. **For Israel, salvation meant liberation. But salvation in the full sense means liberation from the slavery of sin. It is an experience of living in freedom and love with God.**

The liberation of Israel from their slavery in Egypt was a fore-taste of salvation in Jesus that was to come. **The Passover lamb of the Old Testament is a symbol of Jesus, the lamb of God who removes the sin of the world. The blood of the lamb on the door parts became a sign for the destroyer to spare the Israelite houses and pass by them. It became for them a sign of salvation. In the same way Jesus, the lamb of God was destined to give salvation to the entire humanity through his blood.** So, we can say the blood of the only son of God liberated humanity from their sin.



All are Called to Salvation

We were all under the power of sin on account of the sin of our first parents. **But God willed to bring salvation to all through His only son, Jesus.** St. Paul makes it very clear in the letter to the Romans that sin came into the world through one man (Adam) and righteousness came through another man, Jesus (Rom 5:12-19). Again Paul Says: “**There is no one who is righteous, not even one**” (Rom: 3:10). **St. Paul highlights the universality of sin to show that the whole mankind was in need of salvation.**

Obedience to the Commandments; the Basic Condition for Salvation

God entered into a covenant with the liberated Israelites and made them His own people (Ex. 19:4-6). **He gave them commandments so that they may become a redeemed people who are God's own.** The commandments that God gave them

through Moses constituted a way of life that ensured salvation. “Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples.” (Ex. 19:5). The experience of salvation consists in being God's own people and being united to Him. This experience of union with God was lost to Israel through sin.

The Jews thought that mere observance of the law would ensure their salvation and that belief made them keep the law in a literal sense. However, they failed in understanding the real meaning of God's law and living it out. But God in His goodness willed to lead this people on the path of salvation through an inviolable covenant. The terms of this covenant will be written in their hearts and not on tablets of stone. This covenant was established through Jesus, the son of God.



Jesus: The Saviour of the World

The promise that God gave to humankind that he would send a Saviour, was fulfilled in Jesus. He was born to save us from the slavery of sin. This is depicted in the words of the angel addressed to Joseph, asking him to call his name 'Jesus': “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Mt. 1:21). Announcing the glad tidings of Jesus' birth the angels told the shepherds that a Saviour had been born for them in the city of David. While Jesus was presented at the Temple of Jerusalem Simeon spoke with a prophetic vision: “...for mine eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples...” (Lk 2:31). Jesus, through his suffering, death on the cross and glorious resurrection saved humanity from the slavery of sin and fulfilled all the prophecies that had been made about him.

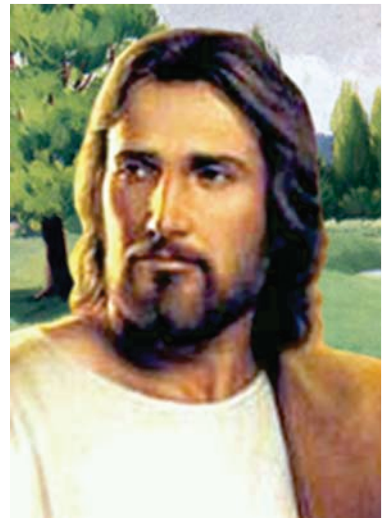


Jesus : The Only Saviour

Peter, the leader of the apostolic group, while replying to the high priest and others in Jerusalem said: “There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12). St. Paul in his letter to Timothy says: “For there is one God, there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human who gave himself a ransom for all...” (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Jesus saved the world through his death and resurrection. The church is the community of those who profess this faith. This is exactly what we pray towards the end of the 'Epicletic Prayer' in the Eucharistic celebration: “we praise you Lord, in the Church, redeemed by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.” This belief that the Church is the community of the people, who were redeemed by the blood of Christ, has been constant and firm from the very beginning of the Church. However salvation is not due to our merit but by God's mercy.

In order to be Saved, Accept the Word of God and Live it

If we want to be saved, we should believe that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, and live according to his words. Jesus says, “It is the spirit that gives life...” (Jn. 6:63). Again we read in the Gospel of John, “Very, truly, I tell you, any one who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life.” (Jn. 5:24). St. Paul says: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).



As a covenant people, we are bound to live the Word of God. The covenant is that you should keep My word and obey My commandments that you may be My own people and My beloved ones. For Jesus says: **“Those who love me, will keep my word; and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”** (Jn. 14:23). It is clear that, in order to belong to God and to the community of the redeemed, we should keep the Word of God.

The Sacraments: Means of Salvation

The sacraments are the means to obtain the forgiveness of sins and salvation or eternal life given by Jesus. **By offering us forgiveness of sins and divine life, the sacraments lead us to the experience of salvation, by the power of the Holy Spirit.**

The Church can be seen as the custodian of the salvation achieved by Jesus and she is the one who distributes it. It is this salvation that the Church ever proclaims. This salvation becomes available to us through the Word of God and the sacraments administered by the Church. The Church always invites and inspires people to come into the salvation through conversion and baptism. Thus the Church, redeemed by Jesus Christ, offers salvation for all and remains in the world as a sign and instrument of salvation for all people.

Word of God to Read and Meditate

John 14: 15-24

Word of God to Remember

“Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasure possession out of all the peoples.” (Ex. 19:5)

Let us Pray

God who made me a member of the Church, the sacrament of salvation, I praise you. Help me to walk through the path of your commandments and reach the glory of heaven.

My Resolution

I shall always walk on the path of salvation by reading the word of God and living according to it.

To Think with the Church

All those, who in faith look towards Jesus, the author of salvation and the principle of unity and peace, God has gathered together and established as the Church, that it may be for each and everyone the visible sacrament of this saving unity. (Vat. II, The Church, No. 9)

To Know the Mother Church

The Mar Thoma Christians who received their faith from St. Thomas, grew in their faith in association with Churches in Edessa, Persia and Selucia, who also received faith from St. Thomas, the Apostle. The immigrants who came from Persia under the leadership of Kanai Thomman enhanced our Church in its growth considerably. The Mar Thoma Christians were Catholic in their faith, Oriental in their liturgy and Indian in their culture.

Questions

1. What does St. Paul say to show that all men are in need of salvation.
2. What is the experience of salvation?
3. Why do we say that obedience to the commandments is the condition for salvation?
4. Jesus is the Saviour of the world, Explain.
5. How are salvation and the sacraments related?