

## HOMILY

### *The Vigil of Easter – Holy Saturday* *March 22, 2008*

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I suppose that when we heard the passage from the Book of Exodus about the parting of the Reed Sea, many of us cannot but help recall that scene in the movie The Ten Commandments. There is Moses, played by Charlton Heston, in a flowing black robe, long hair blowing in the wind, and his arms lifted up with one hand holding the staff that God had given him. The sea suddenly heaves and parts creating a path with rolling walls of water on either side. Then Israel marches through on dry land, barely ahead of the pursuing Egyptian army.

Biblical scholars have attempted to explain the crossing of the Reed Sea as a natural event. But whatever explanation they come up with is not the point; what is important is *who* made it happen.

This passage doesn't want us to ponder just the parting of the waters; it wants to tell us something much more spectacular and wondrous. Namely, that God is at work here. Crossing the Reed Sea is a witness to God and one that calls us to faith. It speaks to us of escape to freedom. It speaks of the miracle of God. It speaks of the water that saves the good and destroys the bad. The Church has made use of this scene as readily as Hollywood. Because, you see, crossing through the waters of the Reed Sea means leaving behind an old way of life and embarking on the other side to a new way of life. And as we hear this passage, it can't but help to remind us of the waters of baptism that tonight will be part of a journey of so many going from one part to another part of life. And as we enter the water of baptism, it reminds us that our God is the one who is at work in our lives. The very one who give us life that is new and fresh and a purpose that will never end.

Through the waters of baptism that some entered for the first time tonight and others of us will be renewed in later, we are given an identity. We are somebody. Just as the Israelites were nobodies before going through the water, before our Baptism, we were nobody. But after going through the water, God makes us somebody.

In crossing the Reed Sea, we are reminded that in every life, dark forces threaten to overtake us. The doctor comes and tells you the illness is terminal; there's no cure. You receive word that the company you work for is closing. Everything you worked for, your home and your dreams, are pulled out from under your feet. You are betrayed by someone you trusted. You watch the evening news of starving children, poverty and civil wars. The earth shakes and you are powerless to stop it, powerless to right the wrong. In going through the waters, we are reminded that our lives are in the hands of God and no torment shall touch us.

When we are baptized, when the water is parted and splashed on our heads, we are told we are somebody. It is a gift. The past is put behind us. All our excuses are washed away. We are given a future.

What kind of future? A totally new and different future, one that embraces life in a new and startling way: the *Way of Jesus*. When the water has parted and ran down our forehead, we were declared to be free people. It was a gift and a great honor—a gift and honor that becomes a great responsibility. It is now our responsibility to share the joy and grace of God with the world, to speak words of encouragement to others, to show compassion and mercy, to have patience and love toward others.