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"I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." (Ex 20:1-17)

Freedom, Sin, and Predilection:



the Pedigree of our Predicament

A two-fold question comes to us in today's reading and it is simplicity itself — *Why?*

The **first** part of the question pertains to God: *Why* did God choose to lead the Jews — and us — out of slavery ... and subsequently out of sin? What motivated Him to do this?

The **second** part of the question pertains to man, and is this: *why* did the Jews — and why do *we* — despite the manifest predilection of God, long to *return* to slavery, to sin, once we are delivered from it? *Why* would we ever wish to go back?

We are perplexed on both counts. Implicit in the first question is yet another: *why* did God choose the Jews among the many people in Egypt at the time under the yoke of slavery? Why not the Nubians, the Canaanites? Why?

Once freed, why did so many of God's *chosen people* yearn to return to Egypt during their sojourn in the desert, disdaining even the Manna from Heaven that God gave them each morning to sustain them and despite their having nothing else? Why do we so often wistfully look back

and yearn for the sin that subdued us in misery – even as we ourselves receive the Bread of Angels in the Most Holy Eucharist?

Even as we ponder this terrible incongruity, yet another question arises that is latent in both: having been delivered from bondage in Egypt, and knowing the misery and humiliation of slavery, why did Israel perpetuate the obscenity of slavery itself?... much as we perpetuate slavery to sin after our emancipation from it?

Having been a people delivered by a merciful God from the degradation of slavery — why did they not abolish among themselves that from which they prayed for deliverance? Why do *we* not among ourselves? It is not unlike like the Parable Jesus gives us where a debtor, freed of his obligation by the mercy of his master, immediately sets about to throttle one indebted to him and for far less? (St. Matthew 18.23-34)

Why do we cherish what we abhor? ... subject ourselves to that from which we had erstwhile sought deliverance? What is this madness?

We cry out to God for deliverance ... and once delivered, return, as St. Peter tells us like a dog to its own vomit? (2 St. Peter 2.22). We cry out to be free, and then clamor again for the yoke of slavery, and what is more, in our freedom immediately purpose to subjugate *others*. We deplore the mercilessness of our former masters and then exceed them in lack of pity toward those we have taken in bondage to ourselves.

Let us attempt to answer the first question.

Why did God choose the Jews and not the Canaanites?

Because He chose to.

It is that simple.

We are ever seeking to constrain the freedom of God, seeking one way or another to make it more acceptable, more pleasing, in a word, more amenable to us, to bend it to our own will — and failing that, indict God as unjust or unfair because it is *our* freedom that is constrained, when we would constrain *Gods'* ...

We look in vain for reasons, justifications, warrants, that would validate the choice, disclose its justification to us – completely failing to understand that anything which *compels* a choice, in some way diminishes the freedom of that choice. The reason for the choice lies outside the choice itself.

It is the way of men. But God's ways are not our ways.

We do not know unfettered freedom. Ours is a freedom that is always either a freedom "to" or a freedom "from", and we do not understand it apart from things extraneous to the unconditioned notion of pure freedom itself. Our most arbitrary choices are always understood in terms outside of the freedom by which they are chosen. We are ever lacking in some way, and all our choices are invariably choices that purpose to supplement what we lack.

The most deliberately "arbitrary" choice to prove, to validate, our freedom, is itself a choice intended to authenticate the very freedom we presume ourselves to possess. It is a choice that is motivated by something we understand to be necessary to authenticating it – which is to say that it is not a totally free choice at all.

God lacks nothing. He is deficient in no way. He wants for nothing. To such a Being, every "choice" is radically free, unconditioned, and stands in need of no explanation for no explanation is possible. There are no other "ends" that could possibly motivate a choice in God.

"I will have mercy on whom I will, and I will be merciful to whom it shall please me"
(*"Miserebor cui voluero, et clemens ero in quem mihi placuerit."*) (Ex 33:19)

The people who would later become the nation did not merit, warrant, earn, or deserve their deliverance. A cursory reading of the Book of Exodus gives us ample evidence of the spiritual turpitude of this people. They were not chosen for any reason apart from, outside of, God's perfect free will. He choose them. Why? *Because He chose to.*

Why Abel and not Cain? Why Jacob and not Esau? Why Joseph and not Reuben? The list is endless.

We rebel against this free will of God – a will that is perfectly, indefeasibly good – and despite what it chooses, which is invariably our own good, we lay out a path for ourselves, and if it diverges from the path that God has set before us, well, all the worse for God. "We will choose what we will choose ..."

It is not only Caligula in his madness who apotheosized himself into the pantheon of gods. He was simply less subversive about it than we are, less ... subtle ...

Our second question was this – why, once delivered from slavery to sin – do we return to it? We leave Egypt ... and then long for it, throw off the yoke of the slave and then yearn for it.

Do you seek a clever answer? You will find none. St. Paul himself lamented, "the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do." (Romans 7.13-24). It is the mystery of sin. But take heart. It is also the mystery of salvation.

We are no less stiff-necked than Israel wandering in the desert. They, too, made gods for themselves, even as *we* make gods *of* ourselves. But that same freedom by which God chose Israel, and by which He chooses us – and against which both have rebelled – brought this people, *despite themselves*, to the Promised Land from bondage in Egypt,

... and it will bring us, too, to the freedom that only exists in sanctity from the slavery that only exists in sin.

Why?

Deus vult. God wills it. God chooses it. Despite the countless reasons we can enumerate why He ought not.



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