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Of Pharaoh and Fear

I hear the whisperings of many: "Terror on every side! Denounce! let us denounce him!" All those who were my friends are on the watch for any misstep of mine. "Perhaps he will be trapped; then we can prevail, and take our vengeance on him." But the Lord is with me ..."
(Jeremiah 20.10-11)

Lent, we had said, is the journey out of Egypt, out of sin. We flee but we are pursued, as God's Chosen People were pursued by Pharaoh's army, reluctant to release the slaves – just as sin is reluctant to let go of us who were once the slaves to sin. We struggle away from it, we flee Egypt, sin ... but it sends out its hordes after us.

Desire could no longer keep us in slavery. We broke from the desire and it no longer has power over us. How else, then, bring the fugitives back to the Task Master, to the sin they have spurned?

Desire, concupiscence, has failed.

If they cannot be lured back to sin through desire, perhaps they can be brought back through fear! Desire or fear, it matters not. The end is the same: slavery once more. Not only is the desert dry, but on its horizon it is endless. It is death. Who would flee the oases of Egypt for death in the desert? Even as it pursues us from behind, sin places this wall before us: and we find ourselves hemmed in on all sides: fear thunders behind us like the very chariots of Pharaoh, and hopelessness looms ahead of us in the desert of our despair, in the nothingness toward which we run for our lives ... even as we see our own bones bleached in the sand beneath us.

"Terror on every side!"

Who has not known it? That frantic plight between hopelessness and fear? You flee for your life at the cost of your death!

Who has found the answer within themselves? None.

"But the Lord is with me ..."

Through Him alone have we been delivered of our desires that kept us enslaved to sin. It was not in us. It was in Him.

Through Him alone will we be delivered from our fears that would bind us as surely as sin and at same price of death – a two-fold death through sin and the fear that would bind us and deliver us to it.

He vanquished our desire for Egypt. He will now vanquish our fear in the desert. What would bind us twice will be vanquished twice!

Oh, yes, the storm clouds of the chariots of fear rise in fury behind us! But a Pillar of Fire, towering to the heights of Heaven itself, rises up before us from the nothingness of the desert and it will scatter our fears like chaff in the wind. What would bind us through fear will hurl us to freedom!

... because we have sat in the desert and trusted in the Lord, our God, before Whom the Pharaoh Fear himself flees in trembling ...

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