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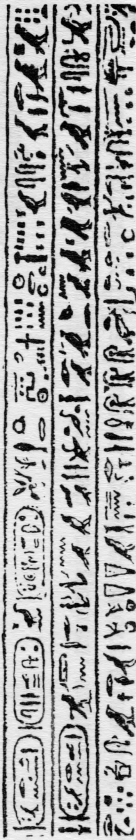
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THE
STORY:
God's Story,
Our Story
as told by
Fr. Eugene
A. Walsh, S.S.



THE

STORY



God's Story, Our Story

AS TOLD BY FATHER EUGENE A. WALSH

Our story begins with God. God is life-giver and lover. That is all that God is. That is all that God does. God loves all people with absolutely unconditional love. This is what we mean when we speak of God's "covenant love". Covenant love means faithful love, total and unconditioned faithfulness.

This means that God loves everyone all the time without any exceptions and without any reservations. No one can put limitations on God's love. No one can change God or do anything to make God stop loving people all the time. This means that God's love is necessarily a forgiving love. God forgives all the time. God's forgiveness is in no way a response to our asking. God's forgiving love is always there. All we can do is to accept it and to celebrate it when we realize it, and to respond to it with our own attempt at faithful love, our own attempt to keep the covenant.

God's Plan for all people

God's unconditional love holds within it God's desire that all people will come and live with God at the end. God wants to enjoy his people and wants them to enjoy him, forever and ever and ever.

So God has set up a plan for all God's people. That plan outlines for us very clearly our destiny and the way we are to get to our destiny. God's "kingdom" is the destiny. "Journey" is our way to get there.

"Kingdom"

Our ancestors, in the Jewish scriptures, understood that becoming fully human requires more than just our own efforts. It requires the help of God. They saw this as the coming of God's reign, God's kingdom. To become fully human ourselves, we need more time than we have and more resources than we, as individuals and as a people, possess. In other words, we need God to be more and more present to us, more and more deeply a part of us, more completely a part of our lives and the lives of those around us.

In the words of our ancestors, we need God as "king" and our lives to be lived in God's "kingdom". We need God alone to "rule" our minds and our hearts, our whole being. We yearn for a kingdom of this loving God.

Journey

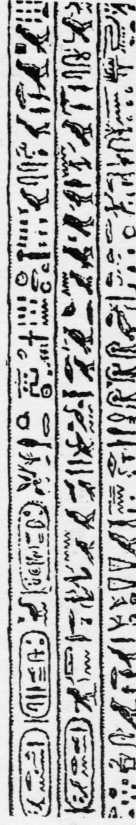
Human life, then, is a journey from human bondage to human freedom, from slavery to liberation, from kingdom to kingdom, from the kingdom of self-centeredness to the true kingdom of self-fulfillment with others.

Life, then, for all people is a "freedom march" from human bondage to human freedom: as much of it as we can achieve here on earth and its fullness after death.

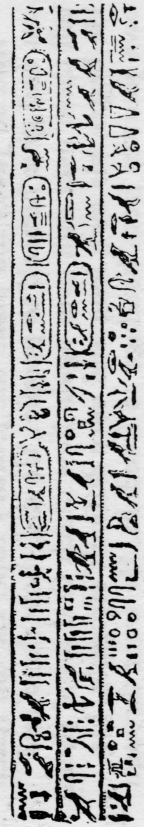
killed each other in the name of the God whose story we could not remember. When killing in the name of the God who loves us so much became less fashionable, we only changed to censoring, condemning, cursing, threatening and excommunicating and called it more "civilized." We had forgotten so much.

In recent times it has been brought home to us very strongly that one of our most important tasks is to tell our story and to celebrate it in sign and symbol.

In our time we have been brought to realize that the most important task of "worship" is to tell our story and celebrate it through signs and symbols so that we can experience it, so that we will be moved to make it happen in our own lives and in the lives of those other people to whom we have been sent. And that is why we gather each Sunday, taking care to be present and hospitable to each other. As a gathered people of God, we listen, again and again, to our story. We all listen together and on purpose. God is really present and moving among us when we do this. Then, we respond to our experience of the story by giving thanks and praise, sharing ourselves and Jesus in communion, and going forward away from church to tell God's story, our story, and to live that story in our labor for freedom, for justice, for peace among all people, God's people.



REV. EUGENE A. WALSH, S.S., is a priest of the Archdiocese of Baltimore and member of the Society of St. Sulpice, an association of priests dedicated to seminary training. The Catholic Church in the United States marks the Fiftieth Anniversary of his ordination to the priesthood in 1988. After a career of guiding seminary students in philosophy, music, pastoral skills and making mature decisions about their vocations, he has devoted the past two decades to helping hundred of parishes and dioceses discover what it takes to make life-giving Sunday Mass gatherings the norm instead of the unusual. He also is the author of numerous practical books and pamphlets on parish life and ministry. His fondest wish for each of us: that we each learn to tell THE STORY in our own way, with conviction. And DO SOMETHING about it.



Church: what the church is "for"

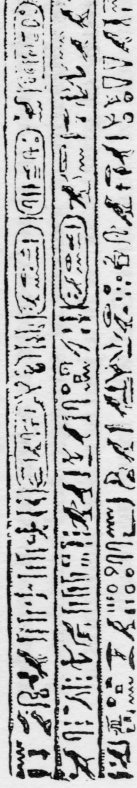
The church is a community of God's people, baptized disciples, formed and fashioned by Jesus and sent into the world by Jesus to be a living and life-giving witness (sign, symbol, sacrament) of God's kingdom, and, along with others, an instrument of God's kingdom, — a maker of the freedom and justice and peace that God has planned for all people and that God intends to make happen for all people.

The Church: Storyteller and Symbolmaker

The church exists to tell the story and to make the story come true. The church does that by telling the story all the time, Sunday after Sunday, but most particularly during the sacred days, the high holydays, the days of Holy Week and Easter. In those first decades and centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus the church began to tell the story on the occasion of the anniversary of those great events that brought Jesus from death to life. Very soon the church began to tell the story on the first day of the week. Sunday became little Easter. And so the story grew.

And so the story has come down to us. Lots of things have happened to the story. For a considerable time the story got lost. The outline got dim and uncertain in the clutter of human and theological error. At times the story became so overwhelmed that people were not able to tell it very well, if at all. To be honest about it, we forgot our story. We even forgot that what we were most of all supposed to do was to tell our story. The story very well got lost and so we have forgotten it. As a consequence we got lost and began to mess up in all sorts of ways. We hated and even

But we just do not get from here to there by ourselves. There is no way. We are caught hopelessly in our human weakness and in the evil we make. Without help from God, there is no way we can fulfill our destiny, no way we can become what God intends us to become.



Creation

Through the energy of creating, God extended to all people their destiny to be fully human. This destiny is established for each person as part of being born. This destiny is the inevitable conclusion of human life. There was a time was when we thought of this destiny as something extra that God added to human life. Now we know better. It is not something extra. It is an essential consequence of being human.

So, along with this destiny, God has provided the way for us to achieve it. God has given us a share in God's own power. We used to think that this share in God's power came with baptism. Now we know that it is given as part of being born into this world.

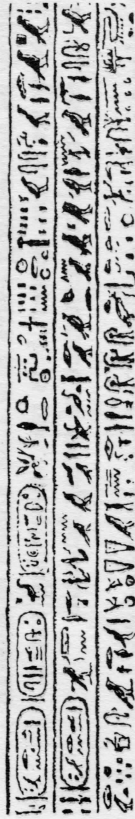
All people who come into this world have a share in God's power. At the same time they are subject to the power of evil. They are caught in the web of evil that we, the people, have made and go on making wherever we are. Left on our own, we can't stop making evil, despite all the good we do. We need God's power to escape the relentless bondage of evil.

God had to find a way to tell us about the plan. God was the only one who knew about it. God had to set about the business of revealing his love and his plan. That is why, after creation, we have what we like to call 'revelation'.

Revelation

God revealed his plan to Abraham first and then, after that, to Moses. Through the revelation to Moses and, even more importantly, through the experience of the Exodus journey, God let us know about his love and his plan. Through the Exodus from Egypt, God made it very clear that the destiny of God's people is freedom and that the way to that freedom is a journey of considerable difficulty, a journey of struggle and hardship. A journey of great risk, it is a journey that demands a great deal of trust in a God who loves so much.

Finally God sent Jesus to tell us how much God loves us, to tell us more clearly and certainly what God's plan is all about, and, most important, to make it clear that God's covenant of faithful love and God's plan is for all people, not just for the Jews.



THE STORY:

God's story, Jesus' story, our story

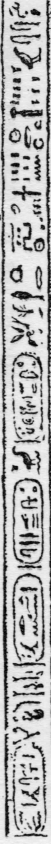
Father to Son

Once upon a time a father said to his son:

“Go to my people, my son, and become one of them. Identify with them. Become a Jewish boy in a Jewish neighborhood already, or they will not accept you. Show them and tell them how much I love them, give yourself to them, give yourself for them. Gather them together and bring them back to me on their freedom journey, their journey from bondage to freedom.

“But before you can bring them back to me, you have to make the journey first.”

And so Jesus did make the journey first. He did reach out and give himself to people. He did show them and tell them over and over again how much God loved them. He began his own long and very difficult struggle, his own journey from bondage to freedom. He went through all the pain and anxiety and fear and confusion that we all know so well. He was a marked man. There was a contract out on him. He was a man on the run. He fought for a while a kind of guerrilla warfare. Finally he gave up, let himself be walked into their camp. He surrendered. They grabbed him, and killed him. And so he died and was raised up. And now we cannot see him or touch him anymore in his own flesh.



Jesus to Us

But we just have to see and touch. That's how God comes to us. God comes to us through our bodies. God comes to us through us. So, before he died, Jesus, becoming more and more aware of what was going to happen to him, turned to his disciples and said to them:

“Now you go to my people. You get out there and take my place. You become my body. You identify with my people, and you show them and tell them how much we love them. You give yourself to them and for them, just the way I did. And you help them on their long and difficult journey back to my Father.

“I will be with you all the time. I will be there showing you the way. It the way that I have already gone. I alone know that way because I alone have gone that way and have broken the chains of human bondage. I have won the victory. I have been raised up to a new life of complete and total freedom. I promise that I will be with you, not only showing you the way, but helping you along the way with the power of the spirit of God that is now completely my own spirit, the spirit that alone can make Freedom and Justice and Peace.”