

BIBLICAL PAGES

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LECTIO on Exodus

Lectio n° 6

I have come down to free them:

God's Exodus

Ex 3:1-4:17

LECTIO

Eight actions on God's part let us know about His 'exodus':

*to see, I have seen,
I listened to their weeping,
I know their sufferings,
I have come down to free them;
to bring it up
I have also seen the cruel way in which the Egyptians are oppressing them.
I send you to Pharaoh*

Moses goes out towards his brethren.
The people go up towards a land that God will give them.
God comes down to free His people.

God's movement is vertical, downward, from Heaven to the earth. This is the form of the love of God, of the One whose throne is set on high but who stoops to look down on heaven and earth. To His downward movement corresponds the movement of those who are little and despised. He lifts the needy from the dunghill, the poor from misery; He lets the barren woman be seated at home and rule.

*Who is like the Lord our God?
His throne is set on high,
but He stoops to look down on heaven and earth.
He raises the poor from the dust,
He lifts the needy from the dunghill,
to give them a place among princes,
among princes of His people.
He lets the barren woman be seated at home,*

the happy mother of sons. (Ps 113:5-9)

Moses' God must be trusted neither because He knows the way, nor because He wants to impose Himself by force or by His light, nor because He roars to convince man, nor because He performs powerful signs in front of Pharaoh, but rather because He is a God who stands besides His people, who listens to them, who sees their oppression, and who comes down for them.

THE FIRE WHICH DOES NOT CONSUME

*Moses was looking after the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian;
he led it to the far side of the desert
and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.
har hā'ēlōhîm, ḥōrēbâh
(Ex 3:1)*

Moses meets God while wandering with his Midianite father-in-law's flock, in a still unknown country. In the desert he discovers a place where God appears to him.

This event takes place on God's mountain in the land of Midian. It is Midianite territory and God's mountain (cf Ex 18:5).

In a similar way, the land of Canaan is defined as God's dwelling.¹

Those look like 'wandering' places, places which lead man to discover a God who makes of each and every external boundary, of each and every foreign land, His dwelling, so that we can call them 'home', a place where there is somebody who is waiting for us, and the place from which all that we are called to be is originated. The place where we can be born again and be what we should truly be.

Moses' encounter with God consists in seeing and listening: the Lord appears to him and entrusts him with a mission.

*The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame
b^elabbat 'ēš,
blazing from the middle of a bush.
Moses looked:
there was the bush blazing,
but the bush was not being burnt up.
wehass^enēh 'ēnennû 'ukkāl
Moses said,*

¹ cf Gn 12:6-7.

*'I must go across and see this strange sight,
and why the bush is not being burnt up.'
When the Lord saw him going across to look...
(Ex 3:2-4)*

The first part of the account is characterized by the verb 'to see', *rā'âh*, which occurs nine times in Chapter 3. Three times it is referred to Moses and six to God:

2 The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame

Moses looked

3 'I must go across and see this strange sight'

4 When the Lord saw him going across to look

7 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt

9 I have also seen the cruel way in which the Egyptians are oppressing them

16 The Lord... has indeed visited you and seen what is being done to you in Egypt

Even before listening to the voice, Moses has to recognise the place, and has to be the spectator of a very special event. Of course, it is an apparition.

But the vision seems to be reciprocal:

man sees God coming down,

God sees man drawing near to Him.

It is always so.

What is important is that, even before giving vent to his objections and frailties, even before his resistance and stammering, Moses is the one who 'recognizes', the one who sees an event that can be measured neither by his past experiences nor by his shortcomings.

Moses is the one who is ready to watch what God performs,

of course being aware of his own frailty,

but entrusting himself to something which he cannot possess and which he cannot measure.

The Hebrew word *s^enêh*, 'bush', is the term common to many Semitic languages referring to a thorny bush; in Arabic it is 'sin', referring to 'Cassia Obovata', a thorny bush growing in the Dead Sea area.

The rabbis help us take note of the pun between Sinai, *sînay*, and *s^enêh*: this experience of Moses' is just a prelude to the subsequent great theophany on Sinai, characterized by fire too.

God chose a symbol to reveal Himself to Moses: a fire burning in the middle of a bush that was not being burnt up. At the end of exodus, Deuteronomy defines God as

*The Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.
(Dt 4:24)*

If, generally speaking, God is a consuming fire, 'ēš 'oklâh, here He chooses to be a fire which does not burn the bush but which enwraps it by its light.

It is a fire which does not destroy, does not consume, does not burn, but sheds light, that is, speaks.

In the account of Creation, God's strong wind restrains itself, reduces its power. God restrains His power and transforms it into a word: 'God said'. God is a God who restrains His power and transforms it into an efficacious and creating word.

*Let there be light.
yehî 'ôr*

This expression 'plays' with aspirations and vowels. It is a stormy wind upsetting the abyss and then progressively calming down and becoming a distinct word, a word which is light and which illuminates everything.

If he renounces his own power, man can become word too. In fact, he was made in the image and likeness of God. Moses will repeat God's action. God will give him some words for Pharaoh (words, not a sword); God will give him some words for the Israelites, who must become the people of God.

The bush enwrapped in fire is God who becomes one with His people.

Here we see God and His people made one in the burning bush!

The bush is a humble little plant; the bush is the image of the humble condition of Israel in Egypt. A fire surrounds and enwraps this bush which is Israel: it is God's fire which does not consume and which does not destroy, but rather warms up, illuminates and kindles love for sacred things; God enwraps the bush with His inextinguishable love, as He stands besides Israel in the hour of misfortune and He guarantees their salvation and protection.

(Rabbi R. Pacifici)

Both the word and the vision speak about God's involvement in the history of His people.

In the middle of a bush.

And not in a different tree, because it is written:

I am with him in misfortune.

(Rashi)

From the heart of the flame enwrapping the bush, the voice reaches out to the history of a people. As He is dwelling in the heart of the bush, so He is dwelling in the history of both individual men and communities.

In the heart, from the heart of history, God speaks.

The God of Israel is not a God of empty spaces,

He is a God of history,

a God that we can come to know through a personal relation with Him,

when our whole life is informed by His salvific will;

He is the God who can be found in the relationship with His people:

this is the very beginning of the exodus symbolized by the flame which enwraps and preserves the bush,

and that is the fulfilment of the exodus, the temple, that is, the place where Israel consigns itself to its God through offer and praise

and where God is the One dwelling in the midst of His people.

This is the true promised land: Love who chooses to dwell in our midst.

The bush is the dwelling of the Most High and we can say that God is

...Him who dwells in the Bush, šōknî s^enêh

(Dt 33:16)

The God Israel believes in, is a God who manifested Himself in the bush, a God whose little dwelling was that thorny bush.

This sign becomes so relevant that in the Christian tradition the burning bush became a symbol of Mary, the 'burning bush' carrying the Son of God in her womb.

The bush becomes the place of revelation of love,

the desert becomes a holy Land.

THE HOLY LAND

When we stand before God the point is not to understand, but rather to worship. In fact, it is through worship that we can understand.

In Joshua 5:15, while the people of Israel who had just crossed the Jordan were waiting in front of Jericho and were about to wage war against the city in order to conquer the land, Joshua suddenly saw a man standing in front of him:

The captain of the army of the Lord answered Joshua,

'Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy'.

And Joshua did so.

(Jos 5:15)

The account of the Exodus, from the exit from Egypt to the entrance into the Holy Land at Jericho, starts and ends with two commands to worship.

In a way, all the Exodus becomes the contents of Israel's worship.

God called to him from the middle of the bush.

'Moses, Moses!' He said.

'Here I am,' he answered.

'Come no nearer,' He said.

'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.'

(Ex 3:4b-5)

This place is a holy place and can be trodden only bare-footed.

Walking bare-footed lets one experience the road, the ground.

Moses takes off his sandals and enters a holy land,

that is, in the orbit of fire and of the burning bush.

His first steps are in the same space that God chose,

in the space that God chose to become one with His people.

Moses will move in this dimension,

that is, along the road that God chose for him, to exist 'for his people'.

Everything in Moses' life will refer to that road.

Moses walks his first steps in the space of God, who is coming down to enwrap His people in love.

His steps are unsteady, guided by Another,

the steps of a man who is entrusting himself,

the steps of somebody who is walking in a completely unknown land.

He enters bare-footed in a space which is not his own, but which makes him its own.

He enters being guided by Another, and letting the voice, the fire of the burning bush, show him the way.

He is very different from the time when he was still in Egypt.

Now Moses does not act any longer out of instinct, that is, because he longs for justice and salvation, but because God is calling him.

Even though God relies on what is good within our hearts, what is within our hearts is not enough: the way belongs to Another,

words and gestures belong to Another,

hope belongs to Another,

Another we entrust ourselves to always unsteadily,

inadequately, stammering,

but chosen and loved.

We are not getting married to our people:

God is, and He sees, listens, comes down and remembers His covenant.

When one of us consecrates himself to mission, he is just walking in the footsteps of another Love

who chose to give Himself to us first.

Of that very gift,

of that gift and none other,
Moses is a mediation, memory and sacrament.

THE GOD OF THE FATHERS

*'I am the God of your ancestors,' He said,
the God of Abraham,
the God of Isaac
and the God of Jacob.'*
*At this Moses covered his face,
for he was afraid to look at God.
(Ex 3:6)*

God presents Himself, and He highlights a story: He is a God to be found in history, in our fathers, in the memory of what did happen. He is a God who has ever existed.

What He tells about Himself is a novelty that He has already told in the history of our fathers.

Therefore, there is nothing new to learn, but we have to recognize the One who has already spoken, who has already seen, who has already heard in the history of our fathers.

This is the power of memory giving rise to prophecy, the power of memory which knows and therefore believes.

We find that experience in the Gospels too. At the beginning of the Gospel of St Mark, of the Gospel who is Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of God is recalled by the ancient word: "It is written..."

It is a novelty, a new creation, but it has already been announced, prepared, and it has been at work in the history that preceded us.

The Gospel of St Matthew begins with the ancestry of Jesus, and so does St Luke's: the experience of salvation is handed down from father to son, from generation to generation.

God always existed; He is a God of the present: 'I am the One who stands besides you, from the very beginning, the God who now is coming down to you.'

This is the God who will always be there for us, and who will make us free from humiliation: He will strike Egypt.

*'I am well aware that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless he is compelled by a mighty hand; he will not let you go until I have stretched out my arm and struck Egypt with all the wonders I intend to work there.
'I shall ensure that the Egyptians are so much impressed with this people that when you go, you will not go empty-handed. Every woman will ask her neighbour and the woman staying in her house for silver and golden jewellery,*

and clothing. In these you will dress your own sons and daughters, despoiling the Egyptians of them.'
(Ex 3:19-22)

A PROPHET LIKE MOSES

Since then, there has never been such a prophet in Israel as Moses, the man whom the Lord knew face to face. (Dt 34:10)

Because God talked to him while he was awake,
not in a dream like He did to Joseph,
not in a vision like He did to Abraham and Jacob.
And God's message is unquestionable.

After the vision, Moses is commissioned.

Moses is sent as God's messenger to Israel: he has to proclaim liberation and then he has to lead the people of God out of Egypt.

He is a mediator and a prophet, with the difference that while the prophets proclaim an impending judgement on God's part, he has to announce God's salvific action in favour of His people.

We must realize how important is mediation:
mediation of the flame and of the burning bush, of the messenger and the voice, of the word, of Moses.

We must believe in the mediation of the senses,
we must believe in the mediation of man;
the exodus is possible on the following conditions: that we believe in a God who goes as far as expecting us to believe in what we can see and hear of Him, and in what of Him we can learn from another man.

Moses is an envoy: seven times in six different lines the Book of Exodus states that God is sending Moses, and the verb used is *šālah*, that is, the term the prophets will use to describe their mission (cf Jr 26:12, 15).

3:10 So now I am sending you to Pharaoh

3:12 ...I was the One who sent you

3:13 The God of your ancestors has sent me to you

3:14 'I am' has sent me to you.

3:15 The Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.

4:13 ...send anyone You decide to send!

The repetition of the concept in the text is very important, because it shows that God is the real power behind any mission, God is the origin of everything.

Mission is equal to ‘obedience to God’. God’s will is the very basis of mission and of its success. Success does not depend on circumstances, but on God’s free will. We must understand it, and then submit to it wholeheartedly.

Moses is commanded to lead Israel out of Egypt (*yāṣâ*’).

3:10 I am sending you for you to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.

3:11 Who am I... and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?

3:12 After you have led the people out of Egypt...

But the Lord also wants Israel to be ‘raised’, *ālâh*, to a good and beautiful country:

3:8 ...and bring them up out of that country, to a country rich and broad

3:17 I shall bring you out of the misery of Egypt to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, to a country flowing with milk and honey.

God is the ‘author’ of the exodus, He is the One who leads Israel out of Egypt. But Moses is God’s instrument in this liberation, a fragile instrument, full of doubts, but God takes care of him, God calls him, speaks to him, gives him the staff, the sign of healing, the voice and words through his brother.

MOSES’ FIVE OBJECTIONS

Moses’ objections to God’s mission make him grow in faith and in self-knowledge, and let him receive new gifts. They are the paths to liberation that he, who has been called to be the liberator, has necessarily to tread.

MOSES’ FIRST OBJECTION

Moses said to God,

‘Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’

‘I shall be with you,’ God said, ‘and this is the sign by which you will know that I was the One who sent you.

After you have led the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’

(Ex 3:11-12)

Who am I?

I shall be with you.

It is interesting to note how Moses tries to find reasons in his own identity, while on the contrary he should find them in the identity of Another.

It is as if he wanted to find within his self the prince capable to lead a people, while he should understand whose servant he is, who his Lord is.

Moses is the one with whom God is.

The great Jewish Medieval exegete Rashi divided Moses' question in two parts:

Moshe said to G.: 'Who am I to go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?' (Ex 3:11)

'Who am I: Am I so important that I can talk with kings?

and bring the Israelites out of Egypt: and even though I were important, does Israel really deserve a miracle? Does Israel deserve to be brought out of Egypt?

According to that commentary, Moses cares about the reasons why the people should deserve redemption, while God cares about the goal of redemption. Redemption is brought about not because they deserve it, but keeping in mind its goal: 'you will worship God on this mountain', ie, to receive God's revelation on Sinai and the gift of the Torah.

The goal of redemption does not lie behind man, but in front of him: to come to know how to love as free men; to come to know that God cares for us.

It is interesting to compare *Yôkebed*'s gestures towards the baby Moses with God's gestures towards His people, both of which express maternal love:

*2 She **conceived** and **gave birth** to a son and, seeing what a fine child he was, she **kept him hidden** for three months.*

3 When she could hide him no longer,

*she **got a papyrus basket** for him; **coating** it with bitumen and pitch, she **put** the child inside*

*and **laid it** among the reeds at the River's edge...*

*9 ...So the woman **took** the child away and **nursed it**.*

(Ex 2:2-3, 9)

The Lord's portion was His people,

Jacob was to be the measure of His inheritance.

*In the desert He **finds** him,*

in the howling expanses of the wastelands.

*He **protects** him, **rears** him, **guards** him*

as the pupil of His eye.

Like an eagle watching its nest,

hovering over its young,

*he spreads out His wings to **hold** him,*

*He supports him on His pinions.
The Lord alone is his guide;
no alien god for him!
He gives him the heights of the land to ride,
He feeds him on the yield of the mountains,
He gives him honey from the rock to taste,
and oil from the flinty crag;
curds from the cattle, milk from the flock,
and the richness of the pasture,
rams of Bashan’s breed, and goats,
the richness of the wheat kernel;
the fermented blood of the grape for drink.
(Dt 32:9-14)*

The Book of Exodus does not only tell about the liberation from slavery in Egypt, but also about the gift of the Law on Sinai and the entry into the Promised Land, the place where the exodus will be fulfilled.

The goal of the exodus is the gift of the land, a wide and beautiful country, flowing with milk and honey.

To go out of Egypt is not enough. The Scriptures wonder what might happen when one becomes free, how he might make use of his freedom, where freedom might lead him. Redemption is not an end in itself, but rather the indispensable condition to welcome the gift of the Word which God will give on Sinai.

The exodus frees them from slavery, so that they can be ready to welcome the revelation of love, to accept it in all freedom and to live according to that gift.

The liberation is conducive to love, because love can be true love only if it is coupled with freedom.

MOSES’ SECOND OBJECTION

*Moses then said to God,
‘Look, if I go to the Israelites and say to them,
“The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,”
and they say to me, “What is His name?” what am I to tell them?
God said to Moses, ‘I am He who is.’
And He said, ‘This is what you are to say to the Israelites, “I AM has sent me to you.”’
God further said to Moses, ‘You are to tell the Israelites,
“The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.”’
This is my name for all time,
and thus I am to be invoked for all generations to come.
(Ex 3:13-15)*

We have already seen in the first unit the meaning of God's name YAHWEH. He is 'I am here', 'I am here beside you'.

He is a God who gives life and freedom, who creates, who beats new paths to freedom and redemption.

Here I would like to highlight that God's name can refer also to the future:

I shall be what I shall be

What God is here and now, He shall be for ever.

I shall be what I am here, the rabbis specify. We can learn about the future from what is happening here and now, that is, from God who stands besides His people in sufferings, slavery, exile.

Each generation will have to go back to the night of the Passover, in order to remember how God acts, and also to recognize the signs of life, the road leading to the Mount where we will be able to serve Him as free men.

The Passover is the measure of history, not vice versa; the Passover is the basis of today's hope.

What God did for His people during the exodus, He will ever do.

MOSES' THIRD OBJECTION

Moses replied as follows, 'But suppose they will not believe me or listen to my words, and say to me, "The Lord has not appeared to you"?'

The Lord then said,

'What is that in your hand?'

'A staff,' he said.

'Throw it on the ground,' said the Lord.

Moses threw it on the ground; the staff turned into a snake and Moses recoiled from it. The Lord then said to Moses, 'Reach out your hand and catch it by the tail.' He reached out his hand, caught it, and in his hand it turned back into a staff. 'Thus they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.'

Next, the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand inside your tunic.' He put his hand inside his tunic, then drew it out again: and his hand was diseased, white as snow. The Lord then said, 'Put your hand back inside your tunic.' He put his hand back inside his tunic and when he drew it out, there it was restored, just like the rest of his flesh.

'Even so: should they not believe you nor be convinced by the first sign, the second sign will convince them; but should they not be convinced by either of these two signs and refuse to listen to what you say, you are to take some water from the River and pour it on the ground, and the water you have taken from the River will turn to blood on the dry land.'

(Ex 4:1-9)

God responds to Moses’ third objection, *suppose they will not believe me or listen to my words*, by giving him two signs: the serpent, and the leprous hand.

To catch the serpent by the tail and turn it into a staff,
to put the hand inside his tunic, so that it may be restored to health.

Moses is the man that God chose in order to transform the inclination toward evil dwelling in man’s heart into adherence to God through His Torah, through His commandments.

Moses is the man who will give the Torah to the people, allowing them to pass from the instinct to do evil to a relation with God, from leprosy to health. He will lead his people from evil to good, from death to life, by teaching them God’s Law.

From serpent to staff,
from evil to obedience to His word.

MOSES’ FOURTH OBJECTION

Moses said to the Lord, ‘Please, my Lord, I have never been eloquent, even since You have spoken to Your servant, for I am slow and hesitant of speech.’ ‘Who gave a person a mouth?’ the Lord said to him. ‘Who makes a person dumb or deaf, gives sight or makes blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, I shall help you speak and instruct you what to say.’
(Ex 4:10-12)

It looks like an accusation against God Himself, who did not give Moses eloquence. In fact, God prepared Moses’ mouth so that it could be really suitable to what it had to do.

Moses has never been eloquent and he is commissioned to speak.

To speak to the people,

to speak to Pharaoh,

to speak with God face to face.

He performs everything through His word: it fights, it persuades, it opens up, it makes people set out on a journey, it meets.

This word must be said and listened to, it is God’s creation.

This word was given by Him. Moses did receive it from Him.

The Lord who makes His people go out of Egypt is the Creator of heaven and earth. The One who gave origin to everything will be able to find a way for His people, as well as a word for His mediator,

the One who calls man will be able to give him what he needs in order to perform the task entrusted to him: in this case, wisdom, doctrine. Moses will know what to say at the decisive moment.

This aspect recalls to mind the prophets. Generally speaking, they did not know in advance the words they would proclaim later on, but each time they received the exact words they had to proclaim (cf Jr 28:11ff).

Moses was not called to say his own words. If he had been a good talker, he would have said what he liked. On the contrary, being a stammerer, he could say just the few words that God gave him.

Therefore, it is exactly because he is a stammerer that he can become a true spokesman for God’s very Word.

This is the true prophet: someone who does not say his own words, but who is an instrument through which God can say His Word. This idea is fulfilled in Jesus, who does not say His own words, but those He has received from His Father:

*For I have given them the words [the teaching] You gave to me.
(Jn 17:8)*

MOSES’ FIFTH OBJECTION

‘Please, my Lord,’ Moses replied, ***‘send anyone You decide to send!’***
At this, the Lord’s anger kindled against Moses, and He said to him, ‘There is your brother Aaron the Levite, is there not? I know that he is a good speaker. Here he comes to meet you. When he sees you, his heart will be full of joy. You will speak to him and tell him what message to give. I shall help you speak, and him too, and instruct you what to do. He will speak to the people in your place; he will be your mouthpiece, and you will be as the god inspiring him. And take this staff in your hand; with this you will perform the signs.’
(Ex 4:13-17)

It is surprising that, in spite of all God’s reassurances, Moses is still resisting Him.

However, he cannot reject vocation, given that God’s will is what our human will really desires.

We can learn that only through obedience.

If God sometimes resorts to ‘violence’, it is because He wants us to be free, and to become what we should be.

By obeying, under coercion, Moses will learn what freedom is in truth. In a similar way, Israel will have to learn that their salvation lies indeed in the liberation from Egypt, but only to serve God, who can be found where true freedom is.

If it is surprising that Moses goes on resisting God,
it is even more surprising that God does not leave him alone, in spite of the fact that Moses goes on reminding Him of his shortcomings.

God communicates Himself to man in the relationship with him. From the very beginning He is the 'Immanuel', as the prophet Isaiah called Him, and St Matthew in his Gospel too, when he described Jesus as the One who made manifest the God-with-us.

God's manifestation always implies His relationship with somebody. This relationship is the vocation of each and every human being, the sign, the manifestation that God is with us.

'Vocation' does not mean only that God is sending someone to do something. It is indeed the relationship that God establishes with a human being, so that that man or woman may become the sign, the manifestation of God in whom we believe.

Vocation is not just the very moment in which God establishes a relationship with a human being, but also the moment in which God entrusts Himself to somebody so that He may be known by somebody else.

He entrusts Himself to our weakness in order to show His power.

God's power is entrusted to our weakness.

God entrusts Himself to those He Himself has made authoritative.

In a way, God is compelled to use violence to us, but the paradox is that when we experience our utter inadequateness with respect to what He is demanding from us, He relies on our hands, our mouths, He relies on the goodness of our hearts, on our intelligence and will, on our feet, and accepts the consequences of His own choice.

God sees and understands the sufferings of the wretched, and relies on a human being to free them.

The Lord responds to Moses' fifth objection by giving Himself as a gift to man, and by giving him his brother as a gift: Aaron is going to meet him, and when he sees him, his heart is full of joy.

Moses had gone out towards his brethren.

Now his brother is given to him as a gift by God and their smile is the starting point of redemption.

According to the rabbinical tradition, Moses' final prayer, 'Send anyone you decide to send', is a plea to God that He may send the Messiah, the One the nations were waiting for.

I like this idea: the meeting between the Lord and Moses ends with a prayer for the advent of the Messiah. It is a kind of Old Testament 'Maranathà'.

WE, TURNED INTO THE BUSH

In the bush there is fire.

A talking fire.

It burns but it does not consume,

that is, it does not reach its fulfilment.

What the bush is revealing is finally revealed by the Son.
Moses and Elijah were talking about His exodus,
which would be accomplished in Jerusalem.²

There the burning bush is consumed,
the holocaust is burnt,
the sacrifice is eaten, in the Son.
The bush is consumed through the gift of His life.

God hears the cry because it is His Son's cry.³
I have seen, I have come down. This bush is familiar with suffering.⁴
And the Father hears His voice.

His love sees the Son, listens to the sorrow of the man of sorrows.
And goes down to free Him.
The Servant grew up like a root in arid ground,
a bush in the desert.
And before the Man of Sorrows we avert our gaze,⁵
like Moses did before the burning bush.
We regarded Him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God.⁶

When the dawn of the day which will shine in darkness for ever comes,
we will not cover our face any longer
and we will turn it back to God again,
no longer in a desert
but in a garden,⁷
in the garden recovered,⁸
the garden of the Principle of all things,
the dwelling of the new man,
recreated in the image and likeness of the Son.⁹
And the bush will be burning for ever in the hearts of those who met the Risen One,
on the road, in life.¹⁰

² Lk 9:30-31. And suddenly there were two men talking to Him; they were Moses and Elijah, appearing in glory, and they were speaking of His passing which He was to accomplish in Jerusalem.

³ Mt 27:50. But Jesus, again crying out in a loud voice, yielded up His spirit. Cf also Mk 15:37.

⁴ Is 53:3. ... a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering.

⁵ Is 53:3. He was despised, the lowest of men, a man of sorrows, familiar with suffering, one from whom, as it were, we averted our gaze, despised, for whom we had no regard.

⁶ Is 53:4. Yet ours were the sufferings he was bearing, ours the sorrows he was carrying, while we thought of him as someone being punished and struck with affliction by God.

⁷ Jn 20:13-16. They said, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' 'They have taken my Lord away,' she replied, 'and I don't know where they have put Him.' As she said this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Who are you looking for?' Supposing Him to be the gardener, she said, 'Sir, if you have taken Him away, tell me where you have put Him, and I will go and remove Him.' Jesus said, 'Mary!' She turned round then and said to Him in Hebrew, 'Rabbuni!' – which means Master.

⁸ Gn 2:8. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, which is in the East, and there He put the man He had fashioned.

⁹ 1 Co 15:22. Just as all die in Adam, so in Christ all will be brought to life.

Now the burning bush is the Word burning in the heart.
The heart of the prophet, burning with a fire that cannot be extinguished.¹¹
The heart of the disciple, burning with the Word of Easter.

No longer the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob,
but my God and your God, my Father and your Father.¹²

From Moses, who believes in the possibility to be free,
to Mary, the loving experience of love who overcomes death.
*What no eye has seen and no ear has heard, what the mind of man cannot visualise;
all that God has prepared for those who love Him.*¹³

To stand in front of the bush
and to listen to His voice,
and to recognize that we are His,¹⁴
means to stand in front of crucified love,
and there to listen to the Word sending us to the encounter,
making us lovers,
and capable of being free when we have to give away our lives like Him.

DIRECTIONS FOR PRAYER

I did not divide the text in two separate lectios, as I think it is better for you to get a general outlook first.

However, when you are meditating on it on your own, please divide it into two parts, and ponder over them respectively this month and next month.

- a) The account of the theophany
 - The fire which does not consume
 - The holy land
 - The God of the fathers.

- b) The account of the mission
 - A prophet like Moses
 - Moses' five objections

The last chapter (We, turned into the bush), recalls both the first and the second part.

¹⁰ Lk 24:32. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?'

¹¹ Jr 20:9. I would say to myself, 'I will not think about Him, I will not speak in His name any more,' but then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones. The effort to restrain it wearied me, I could not do it.'

¹² Jn 20:17. Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to the brothers, and tell them: I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'

¹³ 1 Co 2:9.

¹⁴ Jn 10:2-4. He who enters through the gate is the shepherd of the flock; the gatekeeper lets him in, the sheep hear his voice, one by one he calls his own sheep and leads them out. When he has brought out all those that are his, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow because they know his voice.

The material is so vast that you can linger on any of the chapters. However, I suggest that you consider in particular:

In the first part:

1) The God that we have seen with our eyes

This text is definitely a good opportunity for you to go back to what you have seen and heard, to what our hands have touched, in order to get back the same kind of sight and hearing that we had when we were walking our first steps on the path to consecration.

A very important element of Moses' vocation is vision, which precedes hearing.

What we have seen of God: who is the God that we have seen and that we still see? There are places where we have personally recognized the presence of God, His Word: let us identify these places and let us call them by name, so that we can see God at work in them and they can tell us who God is. It is important to realize what our eyes are able to see, so that we can learn about what we have been called to.

In the second part:

2) our own objections as paths to liberation.

Here we should pay attention to the frailty and inadequateness that we place between ourselves and God, so that we can be aware of which gifts are given to them, as well as the strengths that may turn our resistance into trust.