

## Our Lenten Forty Days Desert Journey

### The Forty years of the Israelites in the Desert

Every year, we are blessed with 40 days of Lent. This number '40' is a key to understand Lent, as the Bible is full of 40s – Noah's 40 days in the flood, Moses' 40 days on Mount Sinai, the Israelites' 40 years in the desert, the 40 days in the life of Elijah and Jonah, and then you have Jesus' 40 days in the desert and 40 days after the Ascension. We will focus on 'The Israelites 40 years in the desert' and draw some desert fruit from it.

Moses was leading the Israelites to the Promised Land; all eyes were on the destination, but for God, the journey itself was the destination, and so for us. For it's in the journey that the Israelites become one people; they discover their own identity, and most importantly, they discover their God. Let's check it out for ourselves:

### Know thyself

1. *Let's not Leave Egypt:* The Hebrews were in Egypt for 430 years (Ex 12:40) and most of those years were in miserable hard slave labour. Their lives were made bitter as taskmasters inflicted them with heavy burdens, hard service in mortar and brick (cf. Ex 1:8-14). Yet, according to a Jewish tradition, many of the Hebrews didn't want to leave Egypt.

*Afraid of the unknown? Scared of taking risks? Lethargic? or Faithless?*

2. *Let's go back to Egypt:* While the destination was a land flowing with milk and honey, the journey would be challenging - scarcity of water and food, deadly snakes, the difficulties of wilderness life. So they kept complaining - "Why did you bring us out of Egypt? We remember the fish we ate in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" (Num 11:5).

*So, let us go back, even if it means going back to serve as slaves (Ex 14:11).*

*Nostalgia for the past! Security? Hopelessness? Lifelessness? Depressed?*

3. *Let's move forward in Faith:* Moses said to the people, "Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord." Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord drove the sea back... And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground. (cf Ex 14:13-22)

*Living in Faith? Proactive? Do I believe in miracles? Spirit-filled? Hopeful?*

4. *Let's make ourselves idols:* When Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments (Ex 24:12-18), he left the Israelites for forty days and nights. Fearing he would not return, they demanded that Aaron make them a god, so Aaron made a golden calf idol. (Ex 32:1-4)

*Idol worship? Materialism? Money, money, money? Hero worship? The Almighty Gadget? A person?*

5. *Let's settle down here:* God had brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt to the borders of the Promised Land (Deut 1:19-21). But because of the danger ahead and the comfort they are experiencing at the oasis of Kadesh, they want to settle down. "That's enough! Let's stay here." But the Lord had other plans: "You have stayed long enough at this mountain...take your journey, and go! (Deut 1:6-7)

*Tired? A comfortable life? A little comfort is better than struggle for the Fullness of life?*

### Know thy God

1. *God who cares for the poor:* I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt... I know their sufferings (Ex 3:7)

2. *God who saves:* God keeps challenging us to leave our Egypt behind.

3. *God who Provides:* I will rain down bread from heaven for you. (Ex 16:4)

4. *God who makes a way:* Even through the waters of the Red Sea (Ex 14:21-22)

5. *God who leads one day at a time:* Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would go forward (Ex 40:36)
6. *God who's with us:* The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people. (Ex 13:21-22)

### **Pondering at an Oasis**

*Now here is how you can make Lent your Oasis, your springtime:*

1. When you view your life as a journey, how would you describe it? (*You may pick up one or more*)
  - Smooth road ahead
  - Scenic journey in good company
  - Bumpy Journey
  - Boring Ride
  - Crowded, smelly local train
  - An Adventurous journey
  - Flat tyre
  - Driving with the brakes on
  - Absolutely Exciting
  - Roadblock
  - Speed limit above 120 km
  - Something else*
2. From the '*Know thyself*' section, which one do you identify with at present/often? Why?
3. From the '*Know thy God*' section, which idea of God do you need to hold on to at this moment of your life? If none of these, which other? Why?

*"I wish you an Enjoyable Journey to the Promised Land"*

***Fr Gerard Rodricks, SJ***