

But don't think ancient Israel had the monopoly on believing God acted in history, others did too; but one of the distinctive trait of Israel was to bring to the liturgy their own personal historical experiences and with them confess their faith in God.

Psalm 103 marries up what God did in the past with what he does in the present:

“Yahweh, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed;
He revealed his intentions to Moses, his prowess to the sons of Israel.” (6-7)

The underlying faith is that God is indeed at work in the lives of his people, and is especially present when they are gathered in his name. The Psalms, and indeed the whole of the Old Testament show that when individuals are called are called by God it is for good purpose and not for self glory; a person's individual vocation is related to God's plan. His first call is to Abraham, an individual, but it that call is for the formation of a new community but it is for the beginnings of a people. The process starts with Abraham; in Moses, some centuries later, the call is refined and we discover the choosing (“election”) of a people, the turning of God to humanity in unconditional love: **Read Deuteronomy 7: 7-8, 11.**

Fast forward now to ourselves!

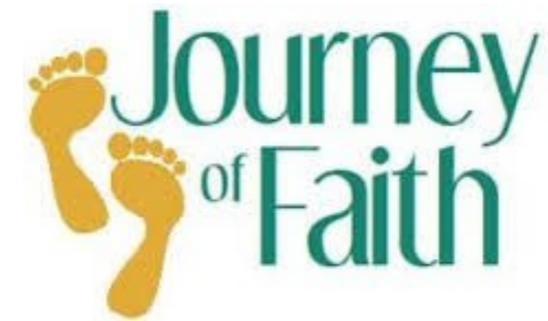
One of the most basic things we can say about the Church is that it is a **People**, a *Gathered People* who believe, live and share the good news of salvation. The Good News is about Jesus Christ, and the title *Christ* is from a Greek word meaning “anointed”. The Church is concerned with the dying and rising from the dead of Jesus Christ and about his sending of the Holy Spirit to gather the whole world into the Fullness of life in God. So the plan of God, revealed through the church, is about our identity as daughters and sons of God, sharing his divine life.

Jesus came to help us realise that true identity. It is that identity we will be exploring as the weeks progress. He wants us to come to know God as our Father and to lead us to him. Although he was Son of God, he was born into this world and undertook the passage from death to resurrection and new life. His goal was to make this passage available to all peoples to the end of time. He announced this good news through his preaching—hence our constant exploration of the Gospel texts. For those who have to come to believe in the Church's continuing proclamation of Christ and his good news, one burning question remains: **How does the world become one with Jesus in his passage to the Kingdom of God?** How does his passage become ours too? The Church's answer is clear: through our participation in the Sacraments of that passage - Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist. These Sacraments initiate us into the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.....on this we will continue next week!!

For reflection at home

Questions I would like answered in the *Journey of faith* this year.....

Hopes I have for the *Journey of faith* this year.....



Welcome to a new beginning in the *Journey of faith* – 2016-2017

O God you are my God, for you I long, for you my soul is thirsting.
My body pines for you, like a dry weary land without water.
So I gaze on you in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory.

For your love is better than life, my lips will speak your praise.
So I will bless you all my life, in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
my mouth shall praise you with joy.

On my bed I remember you, on you I muse through the night,
for you have been my help. In the shadow of your wings I rejoice.
My soul clings to you, your right hand holds me fast.

Psalm 62

An introduction & starting point:

“Human beings stand constantly at the very edge of mystery.
As we stand in our lives at the edge of that endless horizon which is eternity, a horizon of discovery, energy, and endless love, we do not stand there alone. Deep within our spirit, buried in our bodies, kept secret in our hearts, is the greatest of all mysteries. We name that mystery “God”.

This experience of mystery (which is not limited to Christians and certainly not limited to Catholics) can draw us together in a deep bond of human solidarity. In our tradition we call this solidarity “Church”. We see Church (and our tradition) prefigured in scripture; our adult response is to want to plumb the depths of this mystery ever more profoundly, and to look forward to its completion in eternity” (Bill Huebsch).

The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults at a glance

Stage One

Enquiry: Where have I come from? Where am I going? What does my life need? What are my hopes for the future? How can I be most fulfilled? Is there a God? What is driving me in my life? Is it all worth it? How do I find inner peace? How can I make the most of my life? Can I get what you've got?

Entrance into the Catechumenate

Stage Two

Catechumenate: a time of teaching and reflection. The basic questions of enquiry continue to be asked and responded to, with the Christian Gospel and tradition as the backdrop and context.

Rite of Election

Stage Three

Purification and enlightenment: corresponding to the time of Lent; deeper spiritual reflection; the Lenten retreat, participation in the Triduum.

The celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation

Stage Four

Post Sacramental reflection (Mystagogia); what was it like to be initiated? What specific call and opportunity do I experience to ministry in this community?

“Rite” and “Process”

We must note the difference between “rite” and “process”, but recognise their mutuality. Both “rite” and “process” are for the sake of faith, living faith.

Signs of **religion** which desperately needs faith to grow, might be: relating to God only out of fear, feeling a need to appease an angry God; relating to God out of self interest - “my will be done” rather than “thy will be done”; viewing oneself as incapable of attaining salvation; violating the person of another by doing harm to them “in the name of the Lord”.

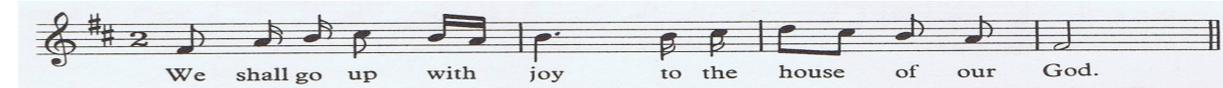
Faith is rather the *ideal* presented to us by the Lord, for example when he called Abraham out of his own land made him our “Father in faith”. It is the ideal of the intimacy of God and humankind as shown in the incarnation of Jesus. Faith is our joining with God in intimate communion. By faith we put aside our self interest and fears and commit ourselves to God’s “dream” for the world. A contemporary hymn links this understanding of faith to the Eucharist, the Mass, the central action of the Church, and sings:

**From the one cup, from the one bread, at the one meal
we are all fed once more in the body, in the spirit, in the Dream!**

The book of the Psalms - a good friend on the *Journey of faith!*

The Psalms express the life of faith: in them you can rejoice, lament, give thanks, weep, express anger, or just praise God in general. Some are songs of pilgrimage, some of longing, some of weariness. The *halel* psalms of the Passover look back and praise God for what he has done; Psalm 121 with which we sometimes open our liturgies is the pilgrimage psalm sung by the pilgrims arriving at the gates of Jerusalem in obedience to the command of the Lord to gather in worship. The singer can scarcely contain his joy as he waits to join the procession into the house of the Lord.

But the splendour of the city is not just its great building. Jerusalem is the place of



encounter. Here the people praise the Lord, and hear God’s authoritative word to them; the building itself speaks of a greater reality: the very presence of Yahweh. *We shall go up with joy to the house of our God.*

A peoples' worship is vital to its identity because it is the expression of its conviction about its God, and how God is relates to the world. Here are three things I think Israel can say about her God as Christianity can: and these are expressed in the psalms:

- **This God is a life giver:** he creates by his very word. He say "let there be" and there it is Psalm, 104 blesses God for all of creation, but also for the very actions of creating - "you spoke and it came to be"; that's the power of this God.
- **This God is an exile-ender:** he brings people home, we call it redemption. When the Lord delivered Sion from bondage, it seemed like a dream...
- **This God is a freedom-bringer;** he calls a people to be his own, calls them into the land of responsibility and vocation. Israel knows herself to be called by God - the church knows herself to have a vocation. Paul calls us not just agents for Christ but his very body; that closeness, the immanence of God, his activity in our midst is celebrated again and again **in the present tense** in the psalms. The Holy God is the one who enters the human world, who acts to make history, who intervenes to deliver the oppressed and humble from the proud and the mighty. The beginning of praise is **meditation** on what God has done, is doing and will do: **Look at Psalm 145: 4-5:**
"Celebrating your acts of power, One age shall praise your doings to another
Oh the splendour of your glory, your renown,
I tell myself the story of your marvellous deeds".

Those acts of power which evoke praise, include undoubtedly things the Psalmist himself has experienced, but mainly they refer to the great events of the past, right back to creation, in which God's greatness and goodness are displayed. Indeed one of the major characteristics of Israel's worship is the **remembrance of the tradition**. And like in our liturgical celebrations, Remembrance is not a just recollection of what happened once upon a time, rather it is a **cultic remembrance**, a liturgical remembrance, in which the presence of Yahweh **makes the past present**, so that worshippers become contemporary with the historical events that are crucial for the community of faith: the similarities to our own liturgical tradition could not be more striking. **Even today, believing Jews regard themselves as being contemporary with the Exodus.**