

Homily based on the readings from July 21, 2025 (Exodus 14.5-18;  
Matthew 12:38-42)

Today's reading from the Book of Exodus presents the culmination of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from their bondage in Egypt. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this event – not just to the descendants of the ancient Israelites, but to all human beings across the globe. Although it is translated as “victory” in the version we heard, this reading contains essentially the first occurrence of the word “salvation” in all of Holy Scripture. Here is a different translation of the same passage:

And Moses said to the people, “Fear not, stand firm, and see the *salvation* of the Lord, which he will work for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall never see again.”

The responsorial psalm, which actually comes from the following chapter in Exodus, includes the second instance of the word:

The Lord is my strength and my song,  
and he has become my *salvation*[.]

The escape from Egypt is the prototype – the archetype – of salvation in human history. It serves as the basis for how we, as Christians, understand and describe the way in which Jesus Christ – in the fullness of time – made salvation available to all mankind.

In particular, this event provides much of our fundamental vocabulary relating to the Sacrament of Baptism. Saint Ambrose, for example, wrote that:

[I]n this crossing by the Hebrews there was already a symbol of holy baptism. The Egyptian perished; the Hebrew escaped. What else is the daily lesson of [Baptism] than that guilt is drowned, and error destroyed, while goodness and innocence pass over unharmed?

As you may recall, the following text is part of every baptismal liturgy:

O God, who caused the children of Abraham  
to pass dry-shod through the Red Sea,  
so that the chosen people,  
set free from slavery to Pharaoh,  
would prefigure the people of the baptized.

In Israel's escape from Egypt, God planted the seeds of salvation that would come to fruition over a thousand years later in the person of Jesus Christ.

It is important to remember, though, that God did not begin the process of saving humanity 2000 or even 3000 years ago – but that he has been building toward it since the Dawn of Creation. We see further evidence of this fact in today's Gospel reading, where Christ himself explains how the ordeals of Jonah foreshadowed his own death and Resurrection:

Just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.

All of human history, from Adam and Eve to the Last Judgment, constitutes an intricate web of circumstances and events that has been painstakingly designed to offer every human being a path to salvation. None of us can hope to comprehend the scope of our own role within the larger drama – any more than the Israelites could understand as they were crossing the Red Sea or Jonah could understand as he was sitting in the belly of the whale. Our *understanding* is not what is important. What matters is that we trust in the Lord and that we play the specific part he has given us with courage and humility. If we do that – freely and joyfully – God will surely bring us safely to shores of salvation.