

There are two traditions about our experience of salvation. One is that it comes as an act of God, delivered once and for all like a strike of lightning. Models for this are (in the Old Testament) the passing of the Israelites through the Red Sea - which is easy to understand as a foreshadowing of Baptism: and (in the New Testament) the Road to Damascus experience of St Paul as described in the Acts of the Apostles, where the former zealot finds himself blinded and ready to be led to Baptism. You can see that both of these models are closely tied to Baptism itself, which we celebrate only once in a lifetime.

But there is another pattern in the Scriptures and in our life, expressed in the first reading today. The superb image of the river welling up as a spring by the door of the Temple; surely we Christians have no difficulty in thinking of the Baptismal font as soon as we read of it. But then, see how the angel guides the prophet again and again to enter the stream, which becomes a river, and then a huge flood impossible to conquer. Here is a repetitive pattern; and we find this expressed in the Liturgy, in our annual revisiting of the Baptismal Font at the Easter Vigil.

In this great liturgy, towards which we are now looking forward with expectation, the Church revisits the themes of Creation, the first stirrings of salvation, the great scene of the Passover itself, and the long years of meditation as the prophets teach the people of God how to understand their lives. Then we read the story of the Resurrection, and find ourselves ready to renew our Baptism in a new year of salvation. Just as the Israelites are commanded to revisit the Passover each year, we revisit the empty tomb, and pass once more through the waters of the font in which we are *continually* reborn.

Each year it comes new. Each year we have fresh experiences and challenges to sustain, new encounters with the faithfulness of God, new calls for our trust and faith. My own experience of illness has robbed me of half of Lent this year; in a way God has asked me to cross another river, and feel the force of this mysterious stream which flows beside me life and yours, bearing us always forward into the unknown, until the mighty image of the ocean appears, where the flow of the sacraments will be lost, and the only the voice of God will command the waves.

I think of the poor man who is paralysed by the waters of regeneration, always too slow to enter in and be healed. We should pray for him today, remembering that in some way it could be that we ourselves have yet to obey the angel, and to entrust ourselves to the water that saves us. This year, this Easter, God is calling us back to the font of rebirth. Let us not be slow to respond.