

FOR THUS YOU WILL GIVE EVIDENCE TO THE NATIONS!

Brothers and Sisters,

The heading above is taken from today's First Reading for Mass, from the Book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, if I recall my studies accurately, is the book from the Hebrew Scriptures quoted by Jesus more often than any other. It must have meant something to Him; I think He wants it to mean something to us.

In today's passage, Moses is speaking to the people. It's the entire people of Israel, their forty years of wilderness wandering coming to a close, their threshold moment of crossing into the Promised Land almost upon them. It is the entire community, gathered together, listening together. Those "called out" of Egypt's slavery to be God's People, the Qahal in Hebrew...a word that kept jumping across languages. Into Greek: *ek klesia* (again, called out); into Latin: *ecclesia* (the church); with English words such as ecclesiology (theology of the church) and eccles cakes (named after an English town, named for a church, where these delicious pastries were first made...but I digress and there's a Lenten Fast to keep).

The Church is called by God to be together, to assemble – indeed, those gathered for liturgy are more rightly known as the Assembly, rather than the Congregation, and certainly far more than an audience. One of the Prefaces at Mass tells us who we are: called to be a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a holy people for God's own possession. We belong to the Lord...again, a word origin thing: the Greek *kuriakos* (the Lord's) gave us the word "church."

But for the time being we can't gather, we can't be together, we can't assemble. So how can we be the Church in these times?

Well, that same Preface goes one to say that we are the Lord's precisely to proclaim everywhere God's mighty works. Think about that. The Assembly doesn't exist for its own sake; it exists to point the world to God, **to give evidence to the nations**, as Moses says today in the Book of Deuteronomy.

AND MAY I SUGGEST, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, that even in our temporary suspension of public Mass, we are still being the Church God calls us to be, for we join with the Civil Authorities and the Medical Experts, in giving evidence. Evidence that this is a serious time, and a serious matter, evidence that demanding precautions are the right thing to do to serve the common good, evidence in ways obvious and not so obvious, that in joining with all people of good will, God is being glorified. As that angelic hymn sung at our Lord's birth – and always before our eyes in our Church (today's visual, below) - assures us.

God Bless,
Fr. Grogan

