

Our first reading is from the Book of Exodus, a book which covers the birth and early life of Moses, the successful escape of the Israelites from Egypt, the Covenant on Mt. Sinai, still called the *theobadiston oros* or mountain on which God trod, and the start of their 40 years in the desert.

Exodus is a fascinating book, but it is **not** a straightforward, continuous, coherent, chronological narrative. It seems to have been compiled from several sources, not very skilfully woven together, and to have undergone much editorial manipulation.

This morning we have the 10 Commandments, the Decalogue, or ten words. As I shall not speak of them, I only remind you of Ted Koppel's comment, made on television many years ago: What came down from Sinai was **not** the 10 suggestions. There is another version of them in Dt 5: 6-21.

Next in Exodus after today's first reading comes the *Book of the Covenant*, just over three chapters of detailed regulations, some of the 613 prescriptions of the Law. In Dt 4.7, Moses says of this Law and all its prescriptions, "When [the peoples] come to know all these laws, they will exclaim 'no other people is as wise and prudent as this great nation.'"

Then chapter 24 tells of the ritual sealing of the Covenant with the blood of bullocks sprinkled both over the altar (symbol of God) and over the people, the two parties to the Covenant. The Covenant itself may be summarized in the sound-bite, *I shall be your God, and you shall be my people*.

Then come three verses (24: 9-11) to which we seldom advert: *Moses went up the mountain with Aaron [and his two sons] and 70 elders of Israel. They saw the God of Israel, beneath whose feet there was, it seemed, a sapphire pavement as pure as the heavens themselves. He laid no hand on these notables of the sons of Israel: they gazed on God. They ate and they drank.* This is most remarkable: usually in the OT to see God face to face is death. Yet here these 74 men saw God and ate and drank in his presence, and lived. They all then went back down the mountain, but Moses then went back **up** again to where the glory of the Lord was in the Cloud, and Moses was called into the cloud with the Lord.

So we have here the Old Covenant (or Testament) accepted by the people and sealed with the blood of bulls, and then a meal in the Lord's presence, and then for Moses a time of direct, immediate, experience of God. Who can say what Moses was told, or what he said in the cloud? We can only speculate.

Does some of this seem familiar? In the New Testament (or Covenant) Jesus preaches the new law, in the Sermon on the Mount, for example. It is accepted, at least by some, and in due course sealed by his own blood, a sealing prefigured at the Last Supper and consummated on the Cross.

Perhaps this could serve as a kind of pattern for our own lives. We have had the new law taught and preached to us. We have accepted it, though we can still deepen and expand our acceptance, and as a consequence have come to this Mass (most of us) to receive in Holy Communion the meal not simply taken in God's presence, but the meal consisting of the Body and Blood of God himself. Surely we should expect that this would be followed, as it was for Moses, by an experience of God's presence; and surely we should expect that this experience will become for us, increasingly, more and more direct, more and more immediate, more and more vivid.