

Thoughts on the Daily Word

12th Week of Year. Tuesday 24th June. Nativity of John the Baptist. Readings: Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 138; Acts 13:22-26; Luke 1:57-66,80.

Back to the desert and the Exodus. When I was working in Jesmond and working alongside my friend the Parish Priest of Byker it struck me just how we always thought of Parishes as stable communities of local residents. All seemed to run on the same pattern of social and spiritual activities. And yet, so much of Scripture focused on the Exodus. Even the Eucharist itself was based on the Passover Meal before departure. Clearly our Parishes weren't about to move off! Yet in our area of Newcastle much of our Parishes were based on people moving, or choosing, where to live and worship. Some travelled distances, some were originally immigrants or refugees. Only a small but solid base actually lived or originated in the area. We were really diaspora or traveller communities. Yet little that we did reflected that tension. After some reflection and prayer, I realised that there were two principal movements in the Scripture. One was journeying and the other was gathering. The Eucharist is often divided between, the Church Gathered and the Church Sent. Long Christian tradition in Europe has tended to focus on the first and has seen the second as mission. In fact, historically, much of the early Christian message was taken by merchants, slaves and travellers across the Mediterranean. The same happened in the Dark Ages after the collapse of Roman civilisation. John the Baptist was a challenge to the settled, Temple focused, elites of his time. He went back to journeying in the desert to remind his people of their roots. Since Vatican 11 we have rediscovered something of our nature of a Pilgrim People, journeying through history. But that is also our individual history, even if we don't move that far from our birthplace. Today's Nativity story, just like Christmas, is intended not just to make us sentimental about babies, but to take us back to our roots, our faith roots, not to feel comfortable but to empower us to move on into the journey.