



## Lenten Reflection for Friday, March 4rd

Geoff Kurtz

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

### Acts 7:35 - 42

*“It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.’ He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us. Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, saying to Aaron, ‘Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.’ At that time they made a calf, offered a sacrifice to the idol, and reveled in the works of their hands.*

*But God turned away from them and handed them over to worship the host of heaven, as it is written in the book of the prophets: ‘Did you offer to me slain victims and sacrifices forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?’*

My favorite book about the Bible might be Michael Walzer’s *Exodus and Revolution*, a meditation on the meanings that the Exodus story has had for people in different times and places. At the end of that book, summing up what Exodus teaches its readers, Walzer writes: “Wherever you live, it is probably Egypt.” Reading Saint Stephen’s speech in Acts 7, and thinking ahead to the season of Lent, I want to add: Whenever we turn away from God, we’re turning back to Egypt in our hearts.

In the Exodus story, “Egypt” is partly the name of a place but also a name, an image, for what’s it’s like to be in captivity, to be oppressed. Stephen, re-telling that story to a council of leaders who are all too ready to cast him out of his community, emphasizes something else: in the Exodus story, Egypt is also a name for what it’s like to be rejected or misunderstood, to not belong. To escape from Egypt, in the Exodus story, means to be free; it also means to be found, to be known, to be embraced by your own.

“In their hearts they turned back to Egypt,” Stephen says. This Lent, I want to ask: When do I turn toward things, habits, ways of being that hold me captive? When do I turn toward misunderstanding of others or of myself? When do I exert myself to get away from the freedom and the embrace that God offers?

We’re used to thinking of rules or limits of any kind as restrictions on our freedom. In that way of thinking, a Lenten discipline that involves giving something up may seem like a miniature Egypt. But Stephen’s speech helps us instead see that kind of discipline as practice at turning toward God, like a miniature Exodus. Or, maybe this is a better way of putting it: we can see a Lenten discipline as a small way to practice *not* turning back to Egypt, a small reminder to relax from our strenuous efforts to get back into the captivity that God is drawing us out of. Then, too, in our usual way of thinking, being commanded to love our neighbors—being commanded to do anything, actually—must seem like an even bigger restriction, an even bigger Egypt. What if that commandment too is a kind of Exodus?

“In their hearts they turned back to Egypt.” But Lent can remind us to be on the lookout for moments of Exodus, small or large.



*Geoff lives in Kensington with his wife, Alyson, and their children, Miriam, Lewis, and Ginger. Along with various combinations of family members, he has been attending Holy Apostles since early autumn (after having drifted through a few times over the previous few years).*