



*A Reflection on Exodus 5:1-6:1 and an excerpt from the  
Commentary on the psalms by Saint Augustine, bishop*

### **Oppression and Suffering**

The common themes of our readings for today are oppression and suffering. As Moses follows the instructions of God and speaks to Pharaoh on behalf of the Israelites, we observe that instead of easing the oppression of the people, Pharaoh responds by increasing their burden. The second reading also addresses the lifting of prayer in a cry of anguish.

Our expectation when we lift up our prayers and follow the ways of God, is that our trials and our burdens shall be eased or removed. How is it, then, that to our surprise, our suffering or the suffering of a loved one continues? Is it that God ignores our prayer? Is it that He does not have compassion for our anguish? Perhaps, it is that there is something for us to observe and learn.

In the case of Moses, the people essentially responded, “Thanks Moses, as if we didn't have enough troubles, you show up and take things from bad to worse. Perhaps you could stop trying to help us now.” Moses went to God and prayed on behalf of the people and said, “*Why do you treat this people so harshly? Why did you send me here? Ever since I came to Pharaoh and spoke to him in your name, he has ill-treated this nation, and you have done nothing to deliver your people.*”

This is our temptation when we do not see the answers to our prayers or resolutions according to our expectations and our limited view of the world. This is the temptation of doubt, which is exactly what the evil one desires to sow within our hearts so we will say to ourselves, “Why bother.”

The response of God to Moses was, “*You will see now how I shall punish Pharaoh. He will be forced to let them go; yes, he will be forced to send them out of his land.*” What was not seen by either Moses or the Israelites was the greater plan of God. Of course, through the scriptures, we know the events to unfold. Moses and the people only saw their plight of the moment, but they did not see the plan of God that would ripple through the generations, even to the very moment of our observation thousands of years later and for an unknown number of years to come.

In the second reading, we are reminded, our prayer is not only the prayer of an individual, the expectations of one person, but that of all who are part of the body of Christ. In the reading, we are told, “No one knows himself except through trial, or receives a crown except after victory, or strives except against an enemy or temptations.” The question before us to see, then, is what is the purpose of our tribulations? What am I to learn? What are those who are with me in the body of Christ to learn, not just for the moment, but as our experience ripples through those who surround us, perhaps even touching generations to come?

We do not see as God sees, but we must trust there is a purpose to our trial. Perhaps the lesson is not only for us, but those who observe. Perhaps the answer to our prayer is not here, but in the kingdom of heaven. We suffer in our struggles. We mourn our losses, but let us not look to our expectations of the moment and this world, but simply offer our trust, that as members of the body of Christ, what trials, suffering, and anguish which God allows is for a greater good to come. It is our trust in and love of the Lord that will produce the eternal victory over the one who seeks our ultimate ruin. We must allow Christ to lead us through the moment to the victory which is to come. If the answers to our prayers are not as we expect, let us trust that our trials and suffering are not in vain, but will yield a greater good that is perhaps beyond us to foresee.