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Monday of the 16th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Monday, July 21, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Exodus 14:5–18
Responsorial Psalm: Exodus 15:1b–6 | **Response:** Exodus 15:1b
Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8
Gospel Reading: Matthew 12:38–42
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Dear brothers in Christ,

Sometimes the road to freedom feels more frightening than the chains we've grown used to. In our first reading from the Book of Exodus, the Israelites, freshly released from generations of slavery, find themselves in a terrifying place—trapped between Pharaoh's army behind them and the Red Sea in front. Their fear turns quickly to panic: "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?" (v.11). It's a cry of despair we may recognise: the moment when hope falters and fear wants to take over.

But God does not scold them. He does not shame them. He simply says: "The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still" (v.14). The Hebrew word translated as "be still"—*charash*—can mean silence, surrender, or letting go. This isn't a passive silence, but the kind that makes space for God to act. The real battle is not just on the shore; it's inside the human heart. God is not only rescuing Israel from Egypt—He is teaching them to trust again.

And in the middle of that, we hear something strange: "The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (v.8). That line can trouble us. But the early Church Fathers like Origen and Augustine remind us: God didn't make Pharaoh evil. Rather, He allowed Pharaoh's own stubbornness to run its course, so that His power and mercy might be revealed more clearly.

Then, after crossing the sea, the Israelites respond not with fear but with song. "I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously" (Exodus 15:1). This is the first recorded song in Scripture—and it bursts forth not from strength but from gratitude. The sea, which in ancient Jewish imagination symbolised chaos and

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death, has become the place of new life. Pharaoh's chariots are buried, but the people of God walk forward on dry ground. God is called a warrior, but not one who conquers for power—He fights to protect, not to oppress.

In our Gospel reading today, the scribes and Pharisees demand a sign. But Jesus doesn't give them a flashy miracle. He gives them Jonah. Jonah, who was swallowed by the sea creature, spent three days in the depths, and then came to preach repentance to Nineveh. Jesus says plainly: "Something greater than Jonah is here" (v.41). That's the real sign: Jesus himself—who will enter death and rise again—calling us not to curiosity, but to conversion.

We too often look for signs on our terms, don't we? We want God to act in big and obvious ways. But most of the time, God speaks through quieter moments: a shared meal during a hard week. A friend's word of comfort. A young person who keeps hoping, even when the world feels broken. These are the Jonah moments of our time.

And here in Zimbabwe, in 2025, we too are standing on a kind of shoreline. Our economy strains to provide. Many families live under pressure, unable to afford basics. Young people feel stuck between dreams and dead ends. It's tempting to look back and ask, "Why did we hope?" But this is the moment when Scripture speaks clearly: do not be afraid. God does not lead us to the sea to abandon us. He leads us there to deepen our trust—and to act through our stillness, our courage, and our solidarity.

Catholic Social Teaching reminds us: every person has dignity. Justice is not extra. It is essential. The poor are not a burden; they are our brothers and sisters. And when this feels overwhelming, we remember: Israel did not part the sea—God did. They only had to be still and trust.

Today we also honour Saint Lawrence of Brindisi—a Capuchin friar, preacher, and doctor of the Church. He spoke many languages, including Hebrew and Syriac, and used that knowledge to dialogue deeply and defend the faith. He travelled across Europe, often on delicate peace missions, armed not with weapons but with Scripture. Like Moses, he stood before kings. Like Jonah, he called cities to repentance. And like Jesus, he trusted in the power of God's Word more than human plans. Saint Lawrence reminds us that one voice—rooted in faith—can calm conflict and bring courage.

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So today, whatever Red Sea you may be facing—grief, uncertainty, fear—remember: “The Lord will fight for you; you have only to keep still.” And when the way opens, walk forward not in silence, but in song.

As we carry these readings into the week ahead, I invite you to pause with these questions:

- What fear is keeping me from trusting the path of freedom that God is opening for me?
- Where have I seen signs of God’s love—in ordinary or hidden ways—and how might I pay more attention this week?
- How might I, like Saint Lawrence, use God’s Word to bring peace, truth, or courage into someone’s life today?

Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today’s readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.