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Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD,  
at the presence of the God of Jacob.

Psalm 114:7

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When I was a teenager one of my holiday jobs was working for my father in his business. Most of his work was building sheep yards, cattle yards, farm sheds, and the like. From time to time he would be involved in the steelwork on larger buildings (like school stadiums). At the time this involved walking across beams and the like (at a reasonable height above ground). Others, of course, have worked at far greater heights. However, now, thinking of such heights, the ends of my fingers tingle. I really don't think I could do this again...

Others, of course, seem to have no real fear of heights. In 1974 French high-wire artist, Philippe Petit walked across the Twin Towers in New York, over 400 metres above ground. He did this without a safety harness. He performed for 45 minutes, making eight passes along the wire. How would you feel walking across with him? (Cf. tightrope walker across Niagara Falls).

There are many 'things' that can bring a sense of 'fear' and 'trepidation' to our lives...

As we think of the World Trade Centre we remembered this past week the sixteenth anniversary of this terrible terrorist attack. At this time many people are fearful about what may happen – not only in terms of such terrorist attacks, but with other conflicts that seem to be escalating in the world. How do you respond to such possibilities...?

Of course, 'fear' can affect us at other levels of life. When a teenager takes their first ride alone in a car parents may 'fear' what may happen... We 'fear' news from a doctor about our health... People say things about us that are untrue and hurtful, and we may either have a sense of 'fear' toward them (the bullies) or the effect such words could have on other relationships... What may 'other people think about us' could be such a fear... 'Fear' can be debilitating and affect in other ways as well...

We may think of people wondering if they should enter a relationship, or to make the real and proper effort to repair a relationship (and the pain and effort this may involve).... Think about it... in what ways may 'fear' affect people's lives...?

As the Israelites left Egypt and came to the Red (Reed) Sea, there was a sense of 'fear'. The people complained to Moses and said he had brought them out into the wilderness to die. There seemed no way out. If you read Exodus 13:71 through to 14:31 you will hear that God did not lead the people through the

northern country (which would have been shorter). Indeed, God expressed a 'fear' that if the Israelites saw the Philistines they would want to return to Egypt! And so, in those days of wandering after that Plague of the Death of the Firstborn, God led the people further south against the Red Sea. And when Pharaoh's army finally took up after the Israelites, their 'backs were against the wall'.

But, as our First Reading tells us (and also our Psalm for this day: Psalm 114), God rescued His people. Where and when and how this happened we do not exactly know. But that it happened we know for sure: the existence of the Jewish people today is proof enough of this. And, at some time later, Psalm 114 was written remembering God's awesome act of salvation.

Psalm 114 is an important part of the Psalms, being one of the 'Hallel Psalms'. The 'Hallel Psalms' (Psalms 113 to 118) are sung each year by the Israelites as they celebrate the Passover (and were most likely sung by Jesus and His disciples on the night Jesus was betrayed: this is important and we will get to this in a moment).

Psalm 114 recalls God's mighty deeds of salvation, and the Psalmist says, "Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD, at the presence of the God of Jacob."

This word 'tremble' is important. The word means to twist or writhe. Among its range of meanings, this verb denotes "writhe as though in labour," "shudder in fear," "wobble in instability" (see Brown, Driver, Briggs, The New Hebrew and English Lexicon, 1979, 297). This idea of 'tremble appears at a number of points in the Psalms (Pss 77:18; 97:4-5; 104:32). To 'tremble' is not a "comfortable" thing.

How would you feel if your 'backs were against the wall' at the Red Sea? What about after seeing God's incredible (and almost violent) redemption of His people?

We are to tremble. And we are to tremble on the account of our sin. More than one Christian writer has spoken about the 'trivialisation of God'. More than one person has said, "Your 'God' is too small". We may sing songs that have lines like "Our God is an Awesome God" or "I Stand Amazed in the Presence of Jesus", but are we 'awed' and 'amazed'? It is so easy to lose the wonder, and for 'Amazing Grace' to become routine.

When Jesus hung on the cross, and as He gave His last breath, the earth shook, rocks were split, and the veil in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51). Not only were people around Jesus 'trembling' for various reasons (think of the pain of His mother, and the disciple He loved, who were at the foot of the cross). As Jesus died even creation trembled. But there were those who did not tremble: who did not tremble on account of their sin that put Him there...

We are to 'tremble' before the Lord. The Apostle Paul says (Philippians 2:12-13): "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Sisters and brothers, Jesus the Christ has stretched out His arms and parted the sea of chaos before us. He calls us to follow Him into the Promised Land of reconciling love. And His love deals with the fears we face: our fear of death' our fears of what may happen to others; our fears as we face the consequences of sin (be it our own, or that inflicted upon us). But Jesus has taken our sin and death upon Himself, and He is our 'rest' and 'peace'. And for us, then, to 'tremble' in God's presence is to look to the cross of Jesus and see God's incredible love for us, and all people!

Christ is in control. The Apostle Paul said this day (Second Reading): "If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:8-9). The Apostle went on to say: "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God'" (Romans 14:9-10).

The power of God's Presence and spoken word remains among God's people to this very day. That is why we practice bowing our heads when we address God in prayer, and bow down onto our knees when we receive that sacrament of Holy Communion, out of respect and awe for God. The psalmist tells us that the creation, the earth has enough "sense" to "Tremble, at the presence of the LORD." And this reminds us that deep reverence for God does not make God less accessible for us or make God into some threatening Presence. Rather, deep reverence for God draws us closer to our True Source of all life and helps us.

What makes you 'tremble' in life? Think about those 'things' that cause us to 'tremble'... There are many things that may cause us to 'tremble', and sometimes rightly so... When we see the pain and suffering in our world, and the evil people may do to one another and themselves, our hearts do 'tremble'. But when we look at the cross of Jesus our hearts also are to tremble on account of His incredible love where His arms are stretched out in love for us.

Do not 'fear' when you 'tremble': trust in our Lord' almighty power and love. Amen.