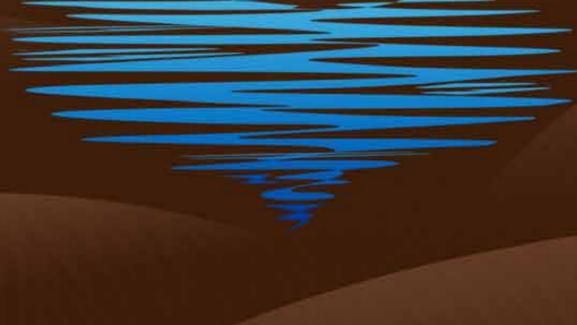


You are EL-ROI!

Gen 16:13



Reflection:

August 2021

Hagar was an Egyptian slave of Sarai, Abram's wife. Sarai's plans to use Hagar as a surrogate mother had run into rough weather when Hagar began to treat her mistress contemptuously. Sarai retaliated and Hagar had to flee (read Gen 16:1-14). Abram might have bought Hagar as a slave for Sarai when he sojourned there to escape the famine in the land (Gen 12:10-20). The faith of her owners in God would have rubbed off on her. Now famished and lonely, this pregnant woman is wandering in the desolate wilderness not knowing where to go or what to do. Yet in that forsaken and lonely place, she hears her name being called. It was an angel of the Lord! He reveals the plan of God for her and the babe in the womb. "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude". But she was to go back and submit to Sarai, for to the Lord, she was Hagar, the maid of Sarai.

Can you imagine Hagar's joy? She, a runaway slave, mattered to God! Her plight, her tears, her agony were not unseen. The plan for her that God revealed, was far beyond the wildest imagination of a slave girl. In sheer gratitude, she whispers, "You are El-roi", the God who sees. "I have seen the God who sees me"! When God reveals himself personally, the veil is removed from one's heart and one begins to see everything in a new light. So now Hagar can go back to the situation from which she ran away since she knows the One who always sees her. She even names the well beside which she encountered the Lord as 'Beerlahairoi' which means the 'well of the God who sees me'.

Like Hagar, the Samaritan woman was a non-entity in her society. Then she meets the One who saw her. He was waiting in the scorching sun just to meet her, for she was precious to Him. He sees in her what no one else did. A potential saint! Not just the sinner, but even the guileless need to encounter this God. Nathanael is somewhat skeptical when Philip tells him about the Messiah. But when Jesus looks into his eyes and lovingly says, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you", he responds with an incredible declaration of faith (Jn 1:45-50). How could Peter ever forget his Lord who waited for him with breakfast prepared? He was at his miserable worst. Not only had he betrayed his Lord but had also taken the lead to go back to the same old trade and place from which Jesus had called him years back. There, on the shores the Sea of Tiberias, Peter meets the One who saw beyond his faults, failures, and fears. Captivated by that look of love, Peter responds to God's plan to feed his sheep (Jn 21:1-17).

Do we live with an awareness of God who is El-roi, the God who always sees us? Nothing will serve as a stronger bulwark in times of trials and meaningless suffering than an unshakable knowing of a God who 'will never fail nor forsake us' (cf. Heb 13:5). For nothing, not our sins, frailties, or failures, can prevent Him from loving us. He has called us by name; we belong to Him. Sometimes, though, life can become so painful, faith so dark, the clasp of sin so tight, that we lose sight of God. Like Hagar, we may try to run away from such situations. But there is a God who sees, who always cares. Can we pray that all our wilderness experiences may lead us to an 'El-roi' encounter? Then, even when we feel that 'darkness is our closest friend' (Ps 88:18), the inner assurance of a God who sees will lead us on. Such an encounter will put an end to our flight and take us back, like Hagar or Peter, to God's plan.