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 Saint Mary's Church
 Proper 16A; Exodus 2:1-18; Romans 12:1-8
 23 August 2026

Cyclops.

The memory of the Trojan horse and sack of Troy.

Scylla and Charybdis.

Helios's sacred cattle.

Doesn't matter if you read it or listen to it or watch it,

Odysseus' journey follows

the hero's journey template to a T,

in which a hero leaves home,

faces major tests or trials

(see above), and,

then finally, returns

home changed.

Today's first reading focuses on another hero's journey beginning.

We hear how a new Egyptian king enslaves the ancient Israelite population.

Somehow the population continues to grow, so then

the king commands that all Hebrew baby boys must be killed.

Shiphrah and Puah, two midwives, thwart the king,

Saying the women are strong and deliver the babies

Eventually one of these babies is placed

in a basket on the Nile,

& rescued by Pharaoh's daughter

to be raised in

Pharaoh's household.

This baby, Moses, grows up to be the one to lead the ancient Israelites

out of slavery and, eventually, after many, many tests and trials,

to the Promised Land.

Moses is the giver of the law, which God gifted

our siblings in the Jewish faith so long ago.

If the Torah has a main human character, it is Moses.

This particular reading from Exodus juxtaposed with
today's reading Paul's letter to the Romans is fantastic.

Given the first passage's focus on Moses, an indisputable VIP,
it is amusing to hear the apostle Paul write:

"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness."

Paul draws a now famous comparison between body parts and people
in the new church community in Rome.

Hands and eyes have different jobs, Paul writes;
so do ears and mouths, legs and hair.

Not only is that okay; it's good!

The body can do more, can be more,
can function far better than if the body
was all eyes, all ears, all feet, all stomachs.

I really appreciate these two passages in tandem.

Our culture continues to give so much weight
to spectacularly gifted individuals

Folks that help us see past the limits of our sight,
Ppl to guide us when the way is unclear and uncertain.

And yes, many lives would be very different,
the history of the world would be very different,
without stories of Moses' life & leadership.

We want to hear about people

like Odysseus

like Moses

like Michael Jordan

like Harry Potter.

They do what the people around them
either can't or won't do.

They're inspiring and interesting.

Paul's framework reminds us that everyone somehow has something to offer,
that everyone has a role

even if we don't recognize it,

That nothing would have come of anything if

Odysseus and his brain,

Moses and his mouth,

Michael Jordan & his limbs

Harry Potter and his heart

Without people around them.

Who would Odysseus be without his crew,

without Agamemnon,

without Penelope and Eumaeus?

Who would Moses be without the ancient Israelites

who followed him into the wilderness,

without Shiphrah and the other Puah, the midwives who saved him,

without Miriam, without Aaron?

Who would Michael Jordan be without everyone on the 1990s Chicago Bulls team,

without Dennis Rodman and Scottie Pippen and Phil Jackson?

Who would Harry Pottery be without the faculty, staff, and students at Hogwarts,

without Hermoine, without Ron, without Neville?

Yes, we won't soon forget the stories of
 Michael Jordan, Moses, Odysseus, and Harry Potter.
 And yet where would **they** be— and who would we be—
 without their alleged sidekicks,
 Without the folks they lead?
 Who would they be with no one to lead?

We often hear about God seeing things differently than humans do.
 1 Samuel, Isaiah, the Psalms, Proverbs, earlier in Romans.
 And, in my experience, this is trotted out most often
 when something bad happens that's hard to understand.
 But why can't it be beautiful too?
 That we are worthy even when we feel worthless?
 That we are playing an important part
 even if everything around us tells us
 we are a background actor
 If we're even **in** the movie?

Honestly, it's overwhelming.
 There are many obstacles to us living that out.
 And it's also so so beautiful.

What would it be like to embrace nuance in a world that doesn't want to do that?
 Start with one person. I mean, that's all we can really start with anyway.
 Thank the person at the cash register by name, wish them a good day.
 Support organizations with good track records—
 With notes, with volunteering, with money.
 Pursue what we might could agree on—

God calls us live, to learn, and to love in that murky, messy middle—
 Where folks all are important even as we highlight good leaders too==
 And that, beloveds, that openmindedness,
 that willingness to try and see around our blind spots,
 The gumption to try,
 that, beloveds, is a true hero's journey. Amen.