

### **GOD! WHAT IS HE REALLY LIKE?**

Almost a hundred years ago a German theologian coined a phrase in Latin in an attempt to define the word "God". He wrote: "Deus est mysterium tremendum et fascinans"; God is a mystery who is both terrifying and fascinating. Everyone has some sort of a definition of what they think the word God means as well as some idea of what he is really like, and no doubt no two such definitions will be the same. Many seem to think of God as a very strict and demanding judge who is always looking to see if one is following his rules and regulations or not. No doubt, such persons live lives dominated by fear. Others see God as one who cares for his creation and wants his creatures to enjoy the universe he has placed them in. Such persons see the wonder of life, the wonder of the world, but at the same time, they want to live their lives their own way with little interference from God. The personal connection between themselves and God is totally missing. And then there are many who see a definite connection between God and themselves, a real relationship which can enhance their lives. God is not only their creator but he is also their friend and guide. Such a relationship involves the Son of God who became one with man in becoming a man himself while still remaining God. Such people have a living faith, a dynamic faith. a loving faith.

In the first reading this Sunday, taken from the book of Exodus, we hear the story of Moses and his first encounter with God. Moses fled Egypt as a fugitive after he stepped into a disagreement between two Egyptians and while trying to help settle their differences he killed one of them. Once this became known he knew that his life was in danger for he was a Jew and now he had killed an Egyptian. He fled into the desert and soon after married into the family of a wealthy sheik and became a member of the family business of raising sheep. His father-in-law was Jethro, who was a priest of Midian along with being a prominent and wealthy citizen. One day Moses took his flock out to pasture further away from home than usual to the foot of the mountain Horeb which was considered by the locals as being sacred and belonging to the gods.

At the base of the mountain, Moses saw a bush which was on fire but was not burning up. This was something very unusual and so he decided to take a closer look. As he neared the burning bush, he heard a voice coming from the bush: "Moses! Moses! Come no closer. Take off your sandals for this is sacred ground. The voice then continued: I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob! Moses knew the history of his people beginning with the call of Abraham. Now he suddenly realizes that this same God who called his ancestors was now speaking to him! With a bit of nervousness and perhaps a bit of shaking, he realizes that he is in the presence of God, the same God of his ancestors.

But Moses does not shrink from fear. He stands his ground. This is the first glance we get of his inner strength, his character, perhaps even his leadership abilities. He listens as the voice tells him that he, God, has witnessed the affliction of his people in Egypt and has heard their cry. He knows what great suffering they are enduring. And then he calls Moses and says that he has chosen him to lead his people out of Egypt into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey. Moses stands his ground, but then asks what he should say when the people ask him who sent him. And he directly asks the voice to tell him his name. Without any hesitation, the voice says his name is "I am who I am!" Is this not a sort of philosophical explanation of the essence of God? that the voice is coming directly from God himself. The

voice then says, "Tell them "I am" sent you. It takes some time and prayer to really appreciate that the all powerful God is now stepping directly into human affairs not to punish but to save the people he loves so dearly. The voice adds: "Thus you shall say to the Israelites: The Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This will be my name forever; thus am I to be remembered through all generations."

Note how personal God is with Moses, and how Moses accepts this as being perfectly normal. Moses was a unique person who must have had deep within him a faith in his God. It would be this faith that would be with him to the very end when he would finally have brought his people to the edge of the Promised Land, some forty years later. Little did Moses realize as he stood there in his bare feet talking with God, what a difficult job He was given to lead his people. But Moses was up to the task and accepted it without any doubts. How could he fail with God at his side?

As we continue our journey through Lent, it is good to think about and pray over just what is our idea or notion of God. Is he someone to fear? Someone we really trust? Someone we can freely talk to? Someone who we know really cares for us? Or do we think of God as someone way out there but really uninterested for who are we among the six billion people presently alive on the planet. These questions may seem over simple or even perhaps a little childlike. The point is that as one who believes in God, one really should have some sort of real relationship with him. He must be a real force in one's life. He must be in a very real way a partner with one as they go through life. In a word, he must really be one's best friend all through one's life. Just about everyone has friends who are not only meaningful in their life but are in many ways essential. No person can simply be just an island to himself. That is not the way we were created to be. God created us to be social, to interact with others, to care about others, to ultimately see God in everyone around whether at home, work or play.

Note that having friends does not mean that one must constantly be looking after them in some way or other. Just to enjoy being with a friend, sharing with them even trivial things, sharing ultimately ones hopes and aspirations is in itself a wonderful blessing from God. But to go a step further, one must try to make God their very special friend, someone they can really talk with and not be afraid to say the wrong thing or make some big mistake. Everything one does with and for their best friend can also be done with and for God. While this may sound a bit childish or perhaps even more a bit difficult, or even scary as to how one really faces their Lord and God, until one really tries it, one will never know how easy and what a joy it can be.

First of all, no one has to know that you talk with God and that you have him as your best friend. This is a very personal thing. Then after you have tried this several times, begin to look for his answering you or in other ways that he communicates with you. So many things we take as signs of good luck, or just simply are fortunate, may very well be the hand of God actually touching one's life. When such things do happen, immediately say a thank you to God. This takes practice, but after a while it becomes a habit and then one discovers just how much God really is in their life. It first comes as a surprise, but then as a real joy and ultimately one finds their life becoming more and more full and joyful. Friends will notice this but will never know what is behind it. It is just between you and God.

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