

3rd Sunday Lent Year "C"

February 27-28, 2016 *Quaeram faciem tuam semper ardentem* Seek His face always with burning desire.

Readings: Exodus 3: 1-8,13-15; 1 Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13:1-9

It is difficult for us to fully appreciate the manifold emotions that must have been going through the mind and heart of Moses as he approached the burning bush in today's first reading. We mustn't fail to appreciate the Hebrew mindset at the time. The appearance of God caused fear of death, since it was believed that no one could see God and live. We are told that Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. His fear combined both tremendous respect for God, mixed perhaps with a dose of humility.

Perhaps he exhibited hints of an irrational belief that as long as he could not see God, God could not see him. I can recall as a child when our puppy was in trouble for something, she would scoot underneath the bed. Of course, only her front half made it under the bed, but if she could not see us, then we must not be able to see her! To hide one's face is an ultimate exercise in embarrassment for humans, and simply fear for animals.

In reflecting upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity, St. Augustine in part zeroed in upon a phrase from Psalm 105, "Seek his face always." His monumental work on the Trinity concludes with a prayer in which St. Augustine wrote: "Seek His face always with burning desire."¹ Recalling the burning bush of Sinai, our hearts must yearn and indeed burn with desire for the Face of the living God. Clearly, even the grand theological treatise ended by seeking more than intellectual understanding, something much deeper.

Literally scores of articles and books have been written about the Divine Name of God "I am Who am," in today's passage, and frankly no one explanation commands the field.

¹ Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 15.27.51

God's Being means active involvement; it means leading the people out of Egypt; it means assisting Moses in vs. 10 and 12, both omitted from today's passage for brevity. 'Yahweh' was accepted as the proper personal name of the God of Israel. Out of reverence for this name, the term *Adonai*, 'my Lord,' was later used as a substitute when speaking so that the name of God would not be pronounced.

In ancient Israel, knowing another's name meant that you were on personal terms with that person. The mysterious name of God is perhaps Divine Justice, in that too often we seek to remove all mystery from our lives. We pine for concrete answers, and are simply unsatisfied without a definitive answer.

Whatever the current "best explanation" the mystery remains and probably will this side of the grave. Pope Pius XII wrote so succinctly on this topic in his landmark 1943 encyclical on Scripture Study. While he endorsed many modern methods of Scripture study including textual analysis and language study, he cautioned against human pride:

Echoing the Church Fathers, the Pope too observed: "God wished difficulties to be scattered through the Sacred Books inspired by Him, in order that we might be urged to read and scrutinize them more intently, and, experiencing in a salutary manner our own limitations, we might be exercised in due submission of mind."²

It is one of the frustrations of life in modern culture that we lose sight of the value and purpose of mystery in our lives. Are we able to live with the mystery present in our faith? Even the Church's Liturgy intentionally embraces this mystery.

² Pope Pius XII, *Divinu afflante spiritu*, 1943, Para. #45

Our Catholic Mass is not intended to be completely and totally intelligible, but is directed beyond itself, in the realm of Divine Time and Space. We enter into this mystery with open hearts and minds, not seeking total comprehension as our goal, but rather total abandonment to His Will. We are on holy ground in this Cathedral, in this sacred space, even while we yet strive towards our final goal of union and communion in God's presence, seeing Him face to face.

We have four weeks until Easter; let us always trust that His promises to us will be kept, and let us do our part to recognize in the burning bush the fire of God's Love for us, as we Seek His Face always with burning desire.