

Pentecost XX October 18, 2020

Exodus 33:12-23, Psalm 99, 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10, Matthew 22:15-22

This morning's readings are all about the image of God – a subject that should be very important to all of us and especially relevant to our lives as Christians working so hard to understand and know the God who creates us, loves us and sustains us.

In the Book of Exodus, we're going to get to spy on a very intimate interaction between God and Moses. We get a rare glimpse of what the prayer life of Moses was like. He tells God "You know us, all by name and we now know your name "O Great" I AM and we know you have love us, but may we please see your face?"

We all have the occasional fear that we're deluded in our faith in God. I'm sure we all have friends and relatives who are skeptical of our faith, love and devotion to an Invisible God. A very good friend of mine once argued "You're ridiculous in your long black dress singing songs to your invisible imaginary friend Jesus".

I'm still good friends with him. I wasn't offended, partly because sometimes it does feel like that – not always though, the mountain-top experiences of God sustain us through times of doubt which are perfectly normal in a life of faith. Also, my friend, is just being a good Agnostic – like so many great minds before him. Personally, I prefer Agnostics who say "I just don't know," I prefer those who are still searching over the Atheists who say they're certain there is no God and I also prefer Agnostics over the Fundamentalist who are so certain and adamant that there is a God of Wrath.

I totally agree with Moses (+Thomas the doubting Apostle) I want to See God – I'd love some proof to back up my faith. I'm totally with Moses when he asks God "Please let me see your face- your image, so I know who I'm in a relationship with." But the God who loves us so much and knows us by name has to protect us. God will tell us "You cannot see my face and survive the radiant brightness of my Light". But our very clever God finds a way – He'll tell Moses to go stand on a Cliff Rock "and I'll cover you with my hand while I pass by, then you can look at my back". In other words, God says "I can't give you the full proof you want, but I'll give you the most proof I can."

Many, many years after Moses, God found another clever way for us to see God as much as we could when God became human and dwelt among us. That overwhelming Light, too bright for us to look into directly, contained himself in a Lantern of humanity in Jesus. And blessed were all those people who got to see Jesus, and hear him teach, and ate with him.

But now, over 2000 years later, we still have to work on Faith, slippery as that can feel. We can still yearn to see God to behold even a glimpse of him. And, again, as always, God finds a clever way for us to see him.

All human beings, every single person, on this planet is made in the image of God and therefore, every single person is like a little mirror reflecting some different angle, a different facet of God's image. If we want to see what God looks like, we just have to look at God in every person we can, to learn everything we can about God through the lens of such diverse and creative brothers and sisters, even from the ones we don't like.

In today's Gospel, some very unlikable people show up trying to trick Jesus into saying something so they can have an excuse to execute God. Nasty stuff from the Pharisees and Herodians (the Herodians are King Herod's "Proud Boys thugs") Their question to Jesus is dripping sarcasm and disdain. They ask him about taxes. Clever Jesus outfoxes the foxes, and says show me a coin". The coin has an image of Caesar on it. And there's that word again, "image". Jesus tell them:

"Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is Gods". It's a clever answer not just because he out-foxed the foxes, but because the coin has an image of Caesar on it, and Caesar, like every single person is himself an image of God, a mirror showing us everything created belongs to God, the coin, the Caesar, even the Herodians. As always, Jesus takes a Win-Lose scenario and turns it into a Win-Win.

I've been thinking a lot lately about our Stewardship of this Gospel message, this vital philosophy of life and happiness that God has entrusted in our hands.

If we aren't steward of God's teachings, there would be no one to keep that message alive to pass on to the next generation and thus, the generations after them. It's up to us to keep and teach and share with as many as possible so they can learn to see God reflected in as many people as possible so we can all get the fullest picture of God's face. We are all like pieces of a mosaic or a puzzle. We can't see a clear image with only a few pieces. We need as many pieces of the mirror as possible, diverse, weird, and wonderful pieces if we really want to see what God looks like.

As you know, we're now starting to record other people reading the lessons of scripture for our liturgies. Today, we bring in Professor Warren Wong. In the week's that follow, I'm working on brining in other new volunteers ranging from the children in our Sea Breeze School to people of color and even a drag queen or two from San Francisco.

My hope is a Win-Win scenario with the diverse people, the children, the marginalized, the ignored that Jesus showed deferential preferences for. If our Christianity doesn't include the tax collectors, the illegal aliens, and every different kind of person, then we'll never get the full reflection of God's face that we so deeply crave and seek.

The Win-Win part of it is that I've been praying and searching for a way for us to include more people. It's quite a challenge in the best of times to include and entice new people into our church community. It's an even greater challenge to attract new people when our only liturgy is virtual/online. So, my hope is to include new unexpected people to come in and help us see God better in the reflections of God in all his/her diversity, even Drag Queens. And our hope is also that we might reflect God to them as well by our loving, non-judging, acceptance of them as

beloved children of God, created in the image of God we love and serve. “May the Word of the Lord sound forth from us: as St. Paul is about to tell us. “In every place and in every person our faith in God has become known.”

Let us now listen attentively with the ears of our hearts to what the Spirit is saying to us in this place and at this time.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit Amen.