

IS G-D Dumb? (Revised December 3, 2016)

“G-D” - The second of the Ten Commandment instructs us to keep the Name of the Lord holy and not to use the Lord’s Name in vain. Within Judaism, in addition to not pronouncing the Sacred Name revealed on Mount Sinai (Exodus 3:14), folks show and foster the holiness of the Lord by not even writing the word God and substituting “G-D”. It’s kind of like maintaining a distance from a high voltage unit out of a healthy respect for the power contained therein. This week, I’m using “G-D” because I want to avoid any semblance of blasphemy or disrespect when I ask the question....

IS G-D DUMB? – If there is no sin or if sin is no big deal, then is G-D dumb? We are taught that God the Father sent the God the Son to be born of Mary through the power of God the Holy Spirit. Why? I’m a pretty nice guy. Aren’t I? Most of us are pretty good people, aren’t we? What’s the big deal? I know I can’t earn heaven, but God is so good and loving, heaven is not weighing heavy on me. I assume I’ll get there---not because I’ve earned it but because God just such a nice God. That said, Jesus and his herald, John the Baptist, are so grim and dire about the *urgency* of our need to repent. Are they just dumb? Do they need to just “chill”? Switch to decaf?

TIMING – In our parish we celebrate First Confessions within the penitential season of Advent. It’s somewhat “secondary” because the primary sacramental event for our seven year olds will be their first reception of Jesus in Holy Communion during Easter Season next spring. The big deal is **Communion**; the goal is **Communion**; however, since communion is neither a given nor automatic, we need to face, admit and deal with all that impedes and prevents true communion. We need to deal with sin.

FROM & FOR – Jesus has come to save us: 1) **FOR** Communion with God, self, others and truth; and 2) **FROM** all that is in the way (a/ k/a “sin”) of becoming capable of such holy communion. What’s the big deal about this or that given choice? Well, in addition to

considering how one decision affects others and The Other, another question is how a particular choice or action affects the kind of person *I am becoming!* If I am not open to taking the next step on the baptismal journey below the surface of things into a deeper conformity of life with the Truth about life, self, other and God, then I could benefit by a sense of *urgency*. There is *something I need to do* in order to receive and be transformed into the kind of person who through Grace has become capable of Heaven....Holy Communion....Real Presence to What is Real.....Beatific Vision....Being saved so as to see as Christ sees.

GRACE vs. PACE – December 21 will be the anniversary of the death in 1807 of John Newton, the author of the hymn *Amazing Grace*. Google him and read about how after his initial conversion to Christ, and even after his ordination to the Anglican priesthood, he *continued for decades* to participate in and profit from the slave trade.

PENITENTIAL LIVING – Such a way of living is the proper response to Jesus' (& the Baptist's) urgent call: "Repent! The Kingdom of God is at hand!" The word repent comes from *re-pensare* which is Latin for re-think, re-frame, re-vision, think again, or think for a second time. There is no exemption from the *ongoing and every day* requirement to live in a penitential manner, that is: to give things "second thoughts" in the Light of Christ. The three classic helps for living penitentially are: 1) Prayer; 2) Fasting; and 3) Almsgiving.

"BAM!" - This signature expression of the TV Chef Emeril Lagasse can be helpful here. The two penitential seasons (Advent & Lent") are *not* occasions to *begin anything*, but rather to take our daily penitential living "up a notch" because "*Bam!*"---Christ is Coming to be born (Advent) and/or "*Bam!*"--- the dying and rising of Christ are coming (Lent).

CONTEXT – It is within these prior and larger contexts of daily penitential living and the penitential season of Advent, that I recommend to myself and you the wonderful sacramental opportunity our Catechism finds so hard to put into words that it needs five names to *begin* to describe the Sacrament of: 1) Penance; 2)

Reconciliation; 3) Confession; 4) Conversion; and 5) Forgiveness. The Catechism presents this sacrament to us under the heading of a “Sacrament of Healing”.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS – Is there anything in me that needs healing and needs it urgently? Is there anything in you that needs to be healed and needs to be healed urgently? Or is G-D just dumb?

SOME HELPS – I invite you to join me in making use of the materials for adult examination of conscience that are available both in our three worship sites, on our parish website and in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) and in the *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults* (2004). Here are some soul-checks I find helpful:

- 1) “Save me, O God, from my unknown sin.” (Psalm 19:13)
- 2) Sin as **Wrong Worship**. Bishop Robert Barron is especially eloquent in describing how wealth, pleasure, power and/or honor serve as classic substitutes for the Ultimate (God) who alone can satisfy our hardwired Hunger and our infinite Parch. Instead of staying with and learning from the failure of finite things to satisfy, we tend to seek more and more of these finite goods.
- 3) Sin, not so much as a record of my misdeeds, as a **Power** that holds me and all creation in bondage. Such a view of sin can help us get a sense of the gravity, the cosmic drama and the need for the death by crucifixion of the One whose birth we are now preparing to celebrate. The Crucifixion of the Messiah means that sin is a big deal to God.
- 4) When I pray the “**Our** Father” is there anyone or any group who I am not including? After I have sinned, am leaving myself out?
- 5) If I spot it, I probably got it. It takes one to know one. (Luke 6:41-42). Often the other serves as a screen onto which I

project (and so bring to light, make available for healing) my own un-faced and un-claimed inconsistencies

- 6) What do I get out of not forgiving? What does not accepting forgiveness give me? **Can I enter into Heaven with bitterness in my heart?** (Matthew 6:12-15; 18:21-22, 35; Mark 11:26; Luke 23:34)
- 7) God is Other. Other than creation. Other than anything or anyone within the created order of existence. Is there any action in the 168 hours of a week whereby I behaviorally acknowledge the Otherness of the Holy One?
- 8) Am I keeping holy (that is, marking out as something different and other) one day a week? One hour a week? If I am responsible for the formation of children...?
- 9) So, I went to confession and said the usual, "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. What's bothering me is.....". When I had finished, the priest asked: "It's good that you can name what is bothering you. Now, dare you ask what might be bothering Jesus, or is this just a spiritual 'selfie'?"
- 10) Am I reading the Bible? Am I allowing the Bible to read me?
- 11) Christ is God in the flesh. My relationship with Christ is to take flesh in me, in my relationships and in this world. Am I respecting the sacredness of all life from conception to natural death? Do I even know of Matthew 25: 31-46 and do I believe that I being held to account for how I treat Christ in the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the stranger, the prisoner, the sick, the substance-addicted, the smelly, the unbecoming, etc.?
- 12) There is a TV series titled *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*. Even our often coarse and crass culture acknowledges that there is something special when it comes to sex. Just *how* special is sex? Our Tradition reveals sex as being so

special that it is sacred. In my thoughts, words and actions am I reverencing the specialness, the sacredness of the human body and of sexual relations?