

The Great God

4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Year B)

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The gap between God and us human beings is great. God is infinite, perfect, and holy; we are finite, imperfect, and sinful. One of the concerns of the people in the Old Testament was how to interact with this almighty God. They had a tradition which said that anyone who saw God face to face would die. This was not necessarily because God was angry with them, but because God was too holy to behold directly by human eyes. Even though there are passages in the Old Testament of God attempting to draw near, their instinct was to push God away. The great God couldn't possibly stoop to their level. God was God and they were mere mortals.

In today's first reading from Deuteronomy, we hear about the people pushing God away. Again, this was not because they didn't love God, but because God was too holy for them to behold directly. The assembly said, "let us not again hear the voice of the LORD, our God, nor see this great fire any more, lest we die." God agreed with their request and stepped back. The reading says that they asked God to send them a prophet instead to speak to them. As a fellow human being, a prophet would speak on behalf of God, but would also be less threatening. God complied and would send them a prophet.

Fr. Karl Rahner, in his spiritual reflections, writes along similar lines to God. He says, "I must confess that the longer I think about You, the more anxious I become. Your Awful Being threatens my security, makes me lose all sense of direction...to me and my smallness

that very thought brings terror- it makes me feel that all my joints are being sundered...I am left in agonizing uncertainty. Whenever I think of Your Infinity, I am racked with anxiety, wondering how You are disposed toward me.” (*Encounters with Silence*, 14-15) Just like the people in the Old Testament, he continues, “no, Lord, You must speak to me in a word that does not mean everything at once, a word that does not embrace the whole of reality in one unfathomable unity. You must say a word to me that means just one thing, one thing which is not everything. You must make Your infinite word finite, if I am to be spared this feeling of terror at Your Infinity. You must adapt your word to my smallness.” (15)

I like this reflection from Fr. Rahner because it reminds us that just because we live in New Testament times doesn't mean that we should lose the great reverence that the Old Testament people had for the infinite God. God the Father is still a great mystery to us. There is a lot about God that we don't know. Just like the people in the Old Testament, we also need someone to bridge the gap and mediate the infinite God to us finite human beings. The only difference is that instead of a prophet, we have Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Even Christians should retain the great mystery of the infinite God and not pretend to have God figured. In my interactions with others, especially with those of other faith traditions, do I pretend that I have God all figured out?

Jesus Christ did not come to take away the mystery of God. God is still God. Rather, Jesus Christ came to teach us that we can let infinite God draw near without being afraid of dying. The response to that is not arrogance, but humility.