

Homily for 22nd Sunday of the year b cycle

Several years ago, an Italian journalist, Vittorio Messori interviewed the late Pope John Paul II for his best-selling book, "Crossing the Threshold of Hope". The journalist's questions were provocative; the pope's answers were illuminating.

A sample:

Your holiness, Why doesn't God give everyone tangible proof of His existence? Why does His mysterious strategy seem to be that of playing hide and seek with His creatures?

And the Pope's thoughtful reply:

"Could God go further in His stooping down, in His drawing near to us, thereby expanding the possibilities of our knowing Him. It seems that He has gone as far as possible. He can go no further.

In a certain sense, God has gone too far."

Clearly, the Pope had in mind the central mystery of our faith, the Incarnation of God. God became man in Christ. Jesus is the Eternal word made flesh (Jn. 1:14). God, indeed, has drawn near to us and promises never to leave us orphaned or alone.

In today's first reading the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses addresses the chosen People. In Judaism, Moses is lovingly called "Moshe Rebbenu", meaning "Moses our teacher" He says,

"What great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him (Deut 4:7)".

Moses exhorts his people to listen attentively to the Word of God. "No, Israel, hear the statutes and decrees that I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land, which the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving you."

By listening to the word of God proclaimed, the Chosen People are blessed.

The marvelous closeness of God is seen above all in the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) He has given to Israel through Moses. The Law is Israel's pride and joy. Through the Law God makes Himself available for His people. Israel can call upon God and He answers. As one Rabbi puts it, "When the words of God are in our mouth, we are in the presence of God".

God's nearness is a spiritual connection.

Saint Thomas Aquinas took up this saying From Deuteronomy in his reflection on the feast of Corpus Christi, the body of Christ. He points out that we Catholics can pronounce these words with even more joy and thanksgiving than Israel could.

God has come to dwell with us in the Eucharist. He is physically present in the Eucharistic species.

To quote Pope Benedict: "He became flesh so that He might become bread"

He puts himself into our hands and into our hearts.

In our journey that will take us to the Promised Land", we Catholics are nourished by the bread of Life. In Christ, God has indeed drawn close to us. And the Lord will lead those who walk the way of His commandments.

Our God is close to us!