

God's vision is still present, if you could only see it

Thomas Gumbleton | Apr. 8, 2010 The Peace Pulpit

On the night when the church assigns nine readings for the liturgy of the word, it might seem extreme for me to add one more, but I really think that in order to get the full sense of what is being spoken to us tonight through God's word, it's important to listen to the very beginning verses of the letter to the Hebrews: "God has spoken in the past to our ancestors, through the prophets, in many different ways, although never completely. But in our times, God has spoken definitively to us through God's son Jesus. Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and bears the stamp of God's hidden being."

What we are being told is that Jesus is the culmination, the conclusion, the definitive ending of revelation, because God is fully revealed in Jesus. But it's important, as we have done tonight, to review how God has spoken. The Vigil in the Holy Night of Easter has been revealed over and over again and we appreciate, I think, more fully what it means for God to be revealed in Jesus, when we recall, as we have tonight, how God has spoken in many and varied ways down through the whole millennium of human history.

In the very beginning, as we heard tonight, God speaks through creation.

This is a revelation that is very, very profound and perhaps on that we do not reflect upon often enough: Why am I here? There's no reason for me to be alive, to exist. Why is anything here where there was nothing? Only because God is a God of love as revealed through creation.

God loved into being all of the universe. God loves into being every one of us. It's very important for us to reflect on this and to be aware of how, not only was there no reason for me to be created except God's love, but there's no reason for me to continue to be except for the sustaining love of God, our creator. It's God's love that keeps me in existence at every instant, at every moment.

The first time I went to Haiti after the earthquake [in January], I visited with a priest, Father Andre Pierre, who is the president of the Catholic University in Haiti. He had the terrible experience of being present when Archbishop Deshayes was killed in the earthquake. Father Pierre was on his way, about 4:30 in the afternoon, for a meeting at the archdiocesan offices with the archbishop and some of the other bishops and leaders of the diocese, but the traffic was heavy and he was delayed. So close to 4:30, he called and spoke to the archbishop and said, "I'll be there very shortly," and the archbishop was very accommodating and not upset and said, "Whenever you get here, that will be fine."

So he made his way there, got there at about a quarter to five, got out of his car and was walking up to the stairway that leads into the diocesan offices. On the balcony above, the archbishop had come out and waved at him, "Glad you're here." Then, before Father Pierre went on, someone stopped him to speak to him, and that's when the earthquake happened. The archbishop on the balcony was thrown out onto the pavement and some of the building came down on him. Father Pierre was, as you would expect, profoundly shaken by that. It's always a question: Why is someone like Father Pierre not killed and the archbishop is killed?

There would be those who say, "Well, God has saved my life." No, it isn't that at all. Earthquakes are natural

Psalm 51:12-13, 14-15, 18-19

Romans 6:3-11

phenomena. God isn't causing earthquakes to kill some people and save other people. It's not that at all. It's just a reminder that any one of us at any moment could be killed, that our life is very fragile and every moment we live is a gift. Not only every moment we live our lives; every moment we exist is a gift from God. Father Pierre told me how affected he was by that, how he realized, as he never had before, what the creative power of God's love meant, how that love keeps us in existence, and will continue to keep us in existence even after we do die and leave this world. It will be God's creating love that continues to sustain us.

So God is revealed as the God of love in the creation events that we heard about tonight. But also as we go through those various readings over and over again, we see how God continues to stay with our human family, to be connected with us. When Abraham was misunderstanding what God wanted, was drawn by those among whom he lived that believed in child sacrifice, God was there to save Isaac, to prevent Abraham from that terrible misunderstanding that God would want someone sacrificed for God. On down through the readings, Ezekiel is a very beautiful one because it shows us a God who takes the initiative. Ezekiel reminds us that when the people were sinners, God says, "I will pour new water on you. I will give you a new heart and a new spirit. I will raise you up, restore you." It's God who takes the initiative.

That's brought out very beautifully in the passage in the book of the prophet Isaiah, where God's people have determined that they must go to war. It's in chapter 30 and God has appealed to them through the prophet not to go to war, but they do. Then in one of the most beautiful lines in scripture, Isaiah says, "But God is waiting to be gracious to you." That's the kind of God who is revealed to us, a God who is always waiting to be gracious to us, waiting for us to turn to God, to be loved by God, to be raised up by God, to be held always in God's love.

The prophet Baruch says something along the same lines when he reminds the people who are caught up in war and conflict, "God's vision is still present, if you could only see it. If you would only look, God's wisdom is here. God is always with us?that vision, that wisdom?and that's what can bring you peace."

So as we listen tonight, we heard a brief history because there are more and more ways throughout the Hebrew scriptures in which God is being revealed to us. We heard just a few of those tonight and now we must remind ourselves again, the fullness of God's revelation comes to us in Jesus. During this past week, hasn't it been true that we have been trying, in a very special way, to listen to Jesus, to watch how Jesus acts, so that we know what kind of a God is our God. Again, God is being fully revealed in Jesus.

At the beginning of our Holy Week, through a very powerful symbol, Jesus shows us that our God is not a God who dominates, a God who wants us to go to war, a God who believes in power over people because, in that symbolic action when they wanted to name him king and Jesus rides into Jerusalem, he doesn't ride the horse of a warrior; he comes into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, rejecting war, rejecting military power and violence. Jesus continues to be revealed to us during this week. When he is betrayed by Judas, what does he do? He reaches out in love to Judas. Judas is leading the mob to arrest him. Jesus walks up to Judas and says, "Friend, why have you come?" It's an invitation to Judas to turn back to God. Jesus always takes that initiative.

With Peter, who denied him, Jesus looks across the courtyard with a look of love that made Peter weep. Over and over again during this week, we watched Jesus reach out in love. On the way to the cross, as he's walking through the crowded streets of Jerusalem, people are mocking him, spitting on him; he never retaliates. When he comes across a crowd of women who are weeping for him, he says, "Do not weep for me. Weep for yourselves and your children." He is concerned about them. Of course, as Jesus is tortured, nailed to the cross, he reaches out in that final act of love, "Father, forgive them." He had told us so clearly, "Don't just love those who love you; love your enemies," and that is the God who is revealed to us in Jesus, a God who loves his enemies. Jesus will not condemn, retaliate, be vindictive; he will only reach out in love, even to those who are killing him.

So tonight as we reflect on this fulfillment of the revelation of God in Jesus, we've only touched barely upon all that Jesus is revealing to us about God, and perhaps it's enough for tonight. We must continue to look at Jesus,

listen to Jesus, watch how Jesus acts, so that we can continue to know this God who has loved us into being, who wants to be in relationship with each one of us. Those who put Jesus to death thought that they had ended his message, but of course we know that the death of Jesus was not a defeat, it was not the end of his message; it was really only the beginning because God raised Jesus from the dead.

So everything Jesus has taught us, all that was revealed to us about God in Jesus, is true. Jesus is vindicated because God has raised him from the dead. Tonight, as we deepen our understanding of the God who has called us into being, we do rejoice. We rejoice and are ready to cry out, "Alleluia, alleluia, Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ has come again." Shall we give thanks to God for revealing God's self to us in Jesus ?alleluia, alleluia.

[Bishop Gumbleton preached this homily at Mount St. Benedict Monastery, Erie, Pa., where he also helped lead the Holy Week retreat.]

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