

From The Pastor

Similar to last week, the readings today reveal and express the power of the divine. Last week we saw the Father radiate his glory through the humanity of Jesus. This divine power was revealed to confirm the identity and mission of the Son, while informing and deepening the faith of the disciples.

In one form or another, to talk about the power of God is to talk about God's holiness. Ultimately, to be holy is to be perfectly other. God is totally other than human persons. God is transcendent and we are not. Yet, we are called to share the holiness of God and come to know the presence of the transcendent in our lives. Despite the reality of human weakness and our limitations, we are called to be holy and reflect in our lives the presence of God who dwells in us. Holiness is not devout perfection and faithful law keeping. Holiness is the messiness of living life in love and justice in the reality of our personal history as those who profess faith in God, and in Christ Jesus. In other words, you don't have to be perfect to be holy.

Moses fled Egypt after murdering the Egyptian, and became a shepherd in the desert of Sinai. Still a man of passion and justice, Moses is trying to find his way in a troubled world. Faithful to his core belief, he remains open to God and the divine way. God knows, and has formed the heart of Moses. Today God acts on Moses' behalf to fulfill a divine purpose. Moses is being called to be holy, set apart by God to fulfill the divine will.

The burning bush is a symbol for the divine. The bush is not consumed for God is eternal. The bush is on fire because the fire of divine love purifies and reveals. Approaching the bush out of curiosity, Moses is startled by the voice of God and removes his sandals for he is standing on holy ground. Now God has his attention. Removing the shoes shows both reverence and subordination in the presence of God. Moses learned this growing up in Egypt where all who came into the Pharaoh's presence must do so barefoot.

This story parallels the story of Abram in that God is initiating a personal relationship and revealing the divine self to a human person. Called to liberate the suffering Israelites, Moses asks who it is that is sending him. He is asking for God's name. God, in an act of profound humility and surrender, shares the divine name with a human being. The name comes, "I am who am." In contemporary English, the power of these words is not easily translated.

To get a more complete sense of the divine name we must add more words. The essence is 'I am who am always with you'. Drawn out more fully: 'I am who I am who is always with you. God is always with us whether we are aware or not. This is consistent with the name we use for God at Christmas: 'Emmanuel, God with us.'

God's name reveals who God is. They are one and the same. God is as God does. In the culture of the time, Moses would have heard and appreciated this as a revealing act of intimacy and self-giving by God. In sharing the divine name, everything is changed. God is no longer distant, but immediately present and active in the daily movement of our existence. Rather than fearful awe and trepidation, Moses hears a profoundly positive, encouraging, and personal invitation to know God personally. Being given the divine name establishes a bond of personal relationship of give and take; being given the freedom to speak and engage God face to face. Moses trusts the experience, and the freedom to interact with God in this very way.

Looking to the gospel, we fast forward several centuries and the name of God now has a face and a body in the incarnate one, Jesus. Now, not only the divine name, but also the divine self in the human person of Christ. We who trust in Christ are confirmed in holiness through the divine nature we share through him. Like Moses, holiness comes with a call that is expected to bear fruit in the One whose life we share.

The gospel confronts us with the necessity to bear fruit through the faith we profess. We are called to repent and see again the divine life that is ours. What fruit do we bear in the name of God who created and redeemed us? This might sound like a scolding, but it is not. It is urgent for us to realize that we are the children of God who profess life and redemption in Christ Jesus. The call is to bear fruit in the gift of the divine life we have been given. It is not God who needs anything from us; it is a matter of claiming and fulfilling our dignity as the holy ones of God. What fruit is being produced in us for the divine light and love that we hold as temples of the Spirit?

We are not growing in the divine nature we share if our lives are not bearing some fruit in love. Notice the patience of the tree grower. For three years he has looked for fruit and found none, yet allows for another year of tilling and spreading of manure. God is ever patient for our growth, and will do all that is possible to pull us forward into his life and love. The urgency of the story is that we take the bait. We will not be here forever, and the time to accept God's love is now; allowing that love to change us into greater and greater reflections of God himself. In the love and fruit we bear, the glory of God will then be seen in each of us.

Father John Esper