

Impressed with God or Embraced by Him?

Sisters and Brothers,

All of us have a problem with Faith. Even we who believe in God and in Jesus Christ have a specific problem that is always in need of conversion. This is also the same problem for those without Faith, and those who say they “believe” but are not participating in any community. The problem we have is this:

We would rather be impressed with God than embraced by Him.

The Gospel of Matthew 7: 22-23 “When the day comes, many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, drive out demons in your name, work many miracles in your name?’ Then I shall tell them to their faces: I have never known you; away from me all evil doers!”

The problem with Faith is that:

We would rather have His **Power** than His **Love**.

We want His **Answers** but not His **Communion**.

We want His **Resurrection** but not His **Passion**.

We want His **Divinity** but not His **Humanity**.

We want His **Miracles** but not His **Friendship**.

Take a good look at your own experience and personal life. Would you rather have children who are impressive or have their love? And you can ask the same question about your husband, wife, parents, or any friendship. A person may be very attractive because of their impressive appearance or talent in the arts, education, athletics, business, or any other public career. Yet what happens when that person in the relationship reveals that he/she lacks compassion, virtue, generosity, courage, an expanded vision of life and humanity informed by faith, hope and loving tenderness, and commitment made manifest by reliability? What happens when that externally very impressive person is experienced as empty in their imagination, shallow in their heart, humorless in their spirit, or a vacuum in their soul opened by envy or revenge?

Take a good look at the life of Jesus Christ, the one whom we believe and proclaim to be God incarnate.

What is so impressive about being born in a stable?

What is so impressive about being a carpenter?

What is so impressive about being rejected by relatives and abandoned and betrayed by friends?

What is so impressive about being executed like a criminal?

Some of the crowd at the foot of the cross laughed at Jesus. "Come down from the cross, then we will believe in you!" Impress us, and then we will believe. That is the reason why I maintain that the true opposite of Faith is ridicule.

The Old Testament has many images of God seeking to embrace us or take us by the hand.

Isaiah 42:6 "I have grasped you by the hand and shaped you."

Isaiah 49:16 "I have engraved you on the palms of my hands."

Isaiah 51:16 "...I have covered you with the shadow of my hand."

Song of Songs 8:3 "His left arm is under my head and his right hand embraces me."

Deuteronomy 32:11 "Like an eagle watching its nest, hovering over its young, He spreads out His wings to hold him."

Psalms 139:10 "Your right hand will hold me fast."

John 10: 28 & 29 "No one can take them from my hand...no one can take them out of the Father's hand. The Father and I are one."

Sister and brothers, we rarely let ourselves be aware of the reality that God does seek to embrace us and to be close to us. He wants to hold us. There is a powerful passage in Jeremiah 31:3. I will inform you that translations vary. My examination of the Hebrew text, and St. Jerome's Latin translation, leads me to put forth the following. "I have loved you from eternity, therefore I have attracted you to myself." God does want intimacy with us and the experience of His mercy is that He draws us close to Him. You will observe that of all the things that God could do for us, Jesus Christ gives us a new and better way to relate to God through himself. He gives us the Eucharist. He gives us more than worship. He gives us communion with Him.

The spiritual center of the Old Testament is in Exodus 33:17. The words of God to Moses: "You are my intimate friend." We need to appreciate the powerful yet unnoticed reality that the Bible is not words about God. Rather, the Bible is the friendship, covenant, with God. Finally those "words" become "flesh" in the covenant incarnate—Jesus Christ. He is that relationship made flesh. The complete gift of Himself is that "new and everlasting covenant." The gift in which God really does embrace us.

Christ is God's plan, His will for us from all eternity (Ephesians 1: 9 & 10): Covenant love and friendship with Him. If we can take this to our heart, perhaps we can pray anew and in captivating ways. As an example: Psalm 40:8-9 "Here I am Lord, I come to do your will"

Praying it anew in terms of what it means for you: “Please look at me Jesus, I want to make and accept your friendship.”

Consider this way to pray: just talk to Him. Actually have a conversation with Him. Moses would talk to God face to face as to a friend (Exodus 33:11. Also Numbers 12:11, and Deuteronomy 34:10.

I find it interesting that in the last word of the Torah is Deuteronomy 34:10 “Since then no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.”

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