

Monastic Scribe XXXV: September 16, 2022

WHO IS G*D?

Who is the God I believe in? It seems that fewer and fewer people say that they actually believe in God anymore. I ask, then, who is this God in whom I do not believe? Have we Christians become too familiar with the God we have believed in? It is so easy to reduce God to our own image, to expect God to be some super old man. Then we are, in addition, influenced by images of God as judge, policeman, headmaster and other similar pictures.

I believe in God, creator of heaven and earth.... So far, so good. We can certainly impose pictures on this divine being as a mother or father for these are, for most people, benign, nurturing figures. But let's first admit that God is, above all, an absolute mystery beyond any attempts of ours to image. There is no way that we can really know or describe God. For me there are the suggestive images in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Burning Bush summoning Moses; the gentle, tiny breeze passing by Elijah's cave; the angel in the night wrestling with Jacob. In Hosea, the Song of Songs, and elsewhere, this God is a spouse yearning for the beloved. But the pictures we now have of the universe, especially the recent photos from the Webb Telescope, shatter our capability of imagining this universe and its Creator. This God is beauty beyond beauty, is love beyond all love. Let's stop picturing God as a western type of older male with its patriarchal mannerisms. Let's look at how Jesus imaged God.

I believe in Jesus Christ.... This ought to be easy. Jesus is the human face of God. But we have usually not seen or explored this face. We immediately say Jesus is God and do not take the humanity of Jesus' face very seriously. We can learn something of what true divinity really is by taking the humanity of Jesus very carefully and paying real attention to his words, actions, and behavior. St Paul (Phil.2) says that Jesus emptied himself of his divinity and took on the form of a slave. He shows us what it means to be a real human person. We come home to ourselves when we become one with him. To be so one with the Christ is not an escape from the world and life, but a deeper immersion into it.

It is only after we have pondered deeply the meaning of the humanness of Jesus that we can begin to deal with his divinity. Jesus is also the Word, the Christ, the One who has existed for all eternity, through whom all created beings were made. He is now, following the resurrection and ascension, the cosmic Christ who, as God and human, embraces the universe as his body and calls us to be, through him and with him, members of this cosmic being. This Jesus, in his frail humanity,

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shows us that God, the creator God, loves us intimately. This mysterious God, is accessible to us through the humanity and divinity of Jesus. Can you believe this? It certainly takes faith. I believe God and I believe in God. This is mind-blowing! This is what the revelation of Jesus is all about.

I believe in the Holy Spirit.... The Holy Spirit as God doesn't enter into the piety of many Christians. There is no real image for us to conceptualize the Spirit. A dove hardly does it! But it is the Spirit who gives life to the Church and whom we should rely on to bring new life. It is the Spirit who accomplishes the sacramental life of the church. The Spirit is the agent of consecration in the Mass. The human priest is the delegated minister to represent all the people in calling the Spirit to effect the Eucharist and he doesn't do any magic! The Orthodox Church emphasizes the invocation of the Spirit as the heart of the Mass, not the words of institution. Father Daniel Horan, OFM, prominent theologian, writes that most of us have a "Holy Spirit Atheism". We really don't trust or rely on the Spirit. We feel it's "all up to us to run the church". He says this is seen in the attitude about the perceived need to police who participates in the Sacraments and then judge who is not worthy to receive them.

These three creative energies, substantial relationships, are one God. Mystery beyond mystery! Why is this all important? Because what we think and image about God determines how we approach this God. It also really reflects what we think about ourselves and all people. That this God is pure relationship tells us what humanity is all about, made in the image of God – relationship!

So look at how you imagine God. Look at the images that come up. Maybe, like many atheists and myself as well, you really can't believe in such a God anymore. Can you live with mystery? Let me know what you think and drop a line to me at: joycet@glastonburyabbey.org

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.