

J.j.

NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN GOD
Homily for Passion Sunday/Palmarum, A.D. 2012
St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Sacramento, CA

We have just heard the reading of the Passion history of the suffering & death, of Jesus Christ. This is the short version. Terrible story -- scandalous miscarriage of justice! A few years ago Mel Gibson made a movie called "The Passion of The Christ." [2004] It was so graphic and so bloody that some were advised not to see it, and indeed a later version was released which had the more bloody scenes shortened. Hollywood and many others of the elite class were outraged that such a movie was made.

Well, why do we go through this every year?

Just when spring is bringing the earth to life again, we retell this sad and terrible story.

Why? Because the story of Palm Sunday through Good Friday and The Day of Resurrection uncovers the mystery of God at work in His world like no other story on earth.

Even so, there are doubters, even among Christians! Why? **(1) No one has ever seen God.**

Listen, **John 1:18** No one has ever seen God, but the Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.

1 Tim. 6:15 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **16** who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, to him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Ex. 3:6 "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Ex. 33:18 Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." **19** And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence..... **20** But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

This is my first point (and I have two more): **No one has ever seen God.** Here's **#2: Although no one has ever seen God, we all have an inborn sense that there is a God.**

The great philosopher, Aristotle, 360 years before Christ, demonstrated this inborn knowledge that there is a God by his axiom of the "Unmoved Mover."

Aristotle's argument for the existence of the unmoved mover progresses as follows:

1. There exists movement in the world.
2. Things that move were set into motion by something else.
3. If everything that moves was caused to move by something else, there would be an infinite [unending] chain of causes. This can't happen.
4. Thus, there must have been something that caused the first movement.
5. From 3, this first cause cannot itself have been moved.
6. From 4, there must be an unmoved mover.

St. Paul, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares that there is a natural knowledge of God.

Rm. 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." [NIV]

So, we all know there is a God, a Prime Mover, a Higher Power.

But there's still that problem -- no one has ever seen God. That could lead us to doubt.

What's more, **Point # 3, God doesn't seem to manage things very well.**

Bad things happen to perfectly good people, and good things happen to very bad people.

Look at the history books -- the force of evil has decayed every last civilization that ever was, and some say that the signs of decay in our present government's move toward socialism means that the end of our own civilization is at hand.

Things fall apart -- metals always decay into rust -- my cup of tea always gets cold!

It's the second law of thermodynamics or the law of entropy: Everything in the whole universe is winding down.

And what's more, the power of death has taken every individual that has ever lived.

I've quoted this before -- someone has said, "God is an under-achiever."

Does that shake your faith? Perhaps it ought to. Many of us have a far too comfortable notion of religion, that it should soothe us and comfort us, but please, pastor, don't shake us up, don't disturb our flowery thoughts of the beauty of God, and always send us home at peace and undisturbed.

A semi-retired ELCA pastor, who now serves as Director of Music in St. James Lutheran, recently wrote his opinion about today's trends in worship.

He sees the move toward more casual dress as a warning sign about casual faith.

He quotes another pastor to the effect that we have no notion of what sort of Power we so blithely invoke as we worship -- we are far too comfortable with God.

We ought to wear crash helmets to church, and the ushers should pass out life preservers and signal flares as we enter the nave, the ship, of the church.

Because the God who seems to sleep may some day wake up and take offense at our sauntering casually through the Liturgy.

C.S. Lewis, in his Chronicles of Narnia, portrays God in these seven volumes as a lion, Aslan.

And when Ms. Beaver is asked by one of the children, who had just seen that majestic lion, "Is he a safe lion, then?" she answered, "No, no, dearie, he's not safe, but he's good."

So here we are, at the threshold of the most sacred week of the year.

We know (1) that there is a God, for our hearts tell us so, and we tend to prefer a safe God.

However, (2) no one has ever seen God, and that's a problem. It leads us to doubt.

Then (3) there are all these other problems -- God seems to be an under-achiever.

So, silly us, we wave our palm fronds on Palm Sunday, then shout "Crucify Him" with the crowds on Good Friday.

But we have heard again today the mystery of God at work in the Passion of Christ.

Ultimately, when we face our doubt, we have nowhere else to turn but to place our trust in the Only true Son of God, Jesus Christ, there on that cross.

He has made God known. He by his death shows the great love God has for His fallen people. Jesus Christ, by His death, has taken away the power of death for all who trust in Him.

Henri Nouwen, a Dutch priest, was once invited to join a troupe of circus trapeze artists for a week, so he went, and then wrote this about: Flyers and Catchers

"One day, I was sitting with Rodleigh, the leader of the troupe, in his caravan, talking about flying. He said, 'As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the greatest star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump.'

'How does it work?' I asked.

'The secret,' Rodleigh said, 'is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything: when I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely over the apron behind the catch bar.'

'You do nothing!' I said, surprised.

'Nothing,' Rodleigh repeated. 'A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him.'

When Rodleigh said this with so much conviction, the words of Jesus flashed through my mind: 'Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit.' Dying is trusting the catcher. To care for the dying is to say, 'Don't be afraid. Remember that you are the beloved child of God. He will be there when you make your long jump. Don't try to grab him; he will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust.'

[Fr. Henri J.M. Nouwen, Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring; Harper, 1994]

Jn.1, "No one has ever seen God, but the Only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made Him known." Trust Jesus, God's Only Son!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

S.D.g.

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