

6th Sun. Easter (C)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
April 30, and May 1, 2016

During the last few weeks of this Easter Season, we have focused on the gospel text of the Mass. In doing that we have skipped over the second Scripture which has been from the Book of Revelation. I chose not to do that this week, however, because today's text from Revelation is such a great complement to today's gospel text.

The question I want us to consider eventually is “What do you ever hope to get from God?” But maybe first consider how sometimes adult children have a similar question in regard to their parents. Yes, some adult children do ask, at least to and maybe among themselves, 'what they expect to get from their parents'. Often this is in reference to what they hope to get from their parents when their parents die, and the will is opened and read. But now back to God: “what do you really hope to get from God?”

I suppose an easy answer is 'eternal life'. I hope for that too, but for most of us here that is some distance off. So, what about now? “What do I (you) hope to get from God' now? Well, some might say,

- cure from the illness that I carry
- greater security in life, maybe even a better job
- success for my children – the repair of a family feud or rupture in family ties

These are okay responses, but there is no guarantee on these, and there is always the chance that if we do get them, we would not be satisfied. There is even a great chance that we would want something more. That is how it always seems to happen. Even cures from an illness, winning the lottery, or the mending of a family issue don't always satisfy us.

So, let me suggest a couple of phrases for us to consider think about ...
the “non-abandoning presence” of God (and)
the “protecting nearness” of God

God's “non-abandoning presence”. Consider God's presence to you now, and the fact that God will never abandon you. Even when we feel that God is not near, that even God may have completely abandoned us, God is still present to us.

The Israelites had this experience and feeling many times throughout their history, especially when they were in the desert. Recall their complaints to God, “Why did you bring us out here into the desert only to die? We would have been better off enslaved in Egypt.” But God was with them ... how else would they have survived the desert?

And we know the famous 'Footsteps prayer' when the one praying sees only one set of footprints and questions this, Jesus replies...

“My precious, precious child, I love you, and would never, never, leave you during your times of trial and suffering. When you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you.”

And the words of St. Paul, *“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine,....? No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Romans 8:31-35, 37-39)

This “non-abandoning presence” of God is ours now and all the time. But we will only know and appreciate this is through regular prayer daily prayer. Daily prayer keeps us in touch with God. We must give time to God in order to know that God is with us in a “non-abandoning” presence.

Families, and parents in particular: your children will know God's presence to them through your own presence to your children. From your loving ways to them, your children will come to know God, and God's angels and God's saints. Your physical presence, your 'being-with' them, not just in the same house or space doing your own thing, but really with them doing their thing with them. Through you they will know God's 'non-abandoning presence'. You can give them nothing greater.

Then the phrase the “protecting nearness” of God. Look within yourself, hold your hand to your chest, your breast, and feel the beat of your heart. Only God keeps it beating. God is near. Recall the devotional hymn “Nearer, My God, to Thee”. You may know it most from a funeral, or from the movie Titanic. Tradition has it that the orchestra on ship that dark night at sea, played “Nearer My God To Thee” as the Titanic sank. But this need not be so. The hymn is based on the story of Jacob's dream in Genesis 28. As Jacob slept one night with his head on a stone, he dreamed of a ladder set up on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven; on the ladder the angels of God were ascending and descending on it” a marvelous example of God's protecting presence. And much latter on in religious history St. Paul says, in Philippians 1:21 “For me to live is Christ”. You and I have this gift of the protecting nearness of God
But again, just as it is prayer that keeps us tuned in to God's “non-abandoning presence”, so words like “God's protecting nearness” only become real to us if we hold them close to ourselves during the week. In the busy world we live in, and with all the activities of families these days, we need these simple ways to stay 'tuned in to God'. Religion and faith cannot be a 'Sunday only' matter. God's presence is 'non-abandoning', and God's protection is very near always. We will only know this, however, if we tune out some other stuff, and stay tuned to God. Tune in to the love and mercy of God ... and then share the love and share the mercy of God with those around..... especially with family.

We are gifted in so many ways!

Thank you, God, for choosing to dwell within and among us.