

7th Sun. Ord. Time (A)
St. Athanasius and St. Francis Parishes
February 18, 19, 2016

How is God made known today?

No doubt there are several ways beauty of nature, reading Scripture, etc. But, there is a more sure and more clear way to make God known to others, and that is for us to embody the holiness and the perfection of God in our own personal lives.

Today we hear more of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. And, we hear more of Jesus' 'you've heard it said, but I say to you" statements. And for us who live in an age that is particularly violent, today's "I say to you" statements are especially pertinent. I am sure we all heard, "*if someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also*" and "*love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you*".

Today's complete set of Scriptures, all three of them together, begin with the words "*Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy*" and end with the words "*So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.*"

And it is important to note that these words were not said to the authorities, state officials, nor even to just religious leaders. These words were spoken to the disciples, to those following Jesus. We need to make God known through the witness of our lives. The first Scripture from the Book of Leviticus, begins, "*The Lord said to Moses, 'Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them....'*"

The easy and quick response to these Scriptures is to think this kind of love is dangerous because it suggests that we take down our defenses. Moreover, it is easy to dismiss these Scriptures thinking that there is no way we can be holy like God, perfect as our heavenly Father. Yes, some of this may be true. But that doesn't mean that we are helpless in this regard, that we can't do at least something to make God known. In fact, we can do something, and we must.

St. Paul admits that at least some of this, and maybe most of this, will be considered foolish by the standards of the world: "*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God ,...*"

So granted that seeking to act in a way proclaimed by today's Scriptures, and knowing full well that others and probably we ourselves will find turning the other cheek foolishness, we need to at least give it a fair try. Turning the other cheek, and loving our enemies would certainly be noticed, and certainly be a way of making God known in the world. Let me offer you a couple of suggestions:

When I was last with my Priest Support Group, we reflected on a short article dealing with the readings of a couple of weeks ago, namely coming to terms promptly with our opponent. You know, the one that says *“If your brother has anything against you, leave your gift at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly.”* My thought is that I need to put a real name to 'the opponent'. When I do, my opponent becomes very concrete, and also limited ... one person. No one can do it all at once, but bit by bit we can make progress. Also, I need to think of the opponent, this person, as a 'brother'. God has created us with a strict bond to Him, and with each other. Every person is either our brother or our adversary. We cannot have a relationship of 'neutrality' with another human being. It is not how we are made, and it gets us no where. It gets the world no where as well. Just look at what we are living through here in our country now. Together we are on a pilgrimage to one and the same goal ... the face-to-face encounter with our Friend, Judge, and God. One origin, one road, one goal for all of us, and woe to me if I should decide that my brother does not in fact have the same Father as myself! So, name your opponent, your hard to deal with person, and see them as a brother/sister.

A second suggestion is to be clever about this. Don't bite off to much, but also don't start with where you are, the status quo. A large faith-based school system had created a set of values and attitudes that they wanted all in the system to try to acquire. They did this and posted the values and attitudes on everything they used and touched. But then the leader of the system realized that they were also working on a 'dismissal policy' ... like what to do with students who were disruptive, and the policy they were working on was violation of many of the values they had chosen to live by. When we try to live God's life here on earth, start there.... start with the Beatitudes, start with the Commandments, start with the Scriptures you know. Don't start with 'this is how we do things here', and try to justify how you live with something from the Scriptures. Start with the Scriptures, and let the Scriptures tell you how to act. Recall the Scripture *“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves..”* Mt. 10:16

In making God known to the world, we cannot start with the world's solutions, with the world's way. Begin with God, God's word, the things Jesus said and the way Jesus lived. Then say, what does this suggest for my behavior in this situation?

Vaclav Havel, the former president of the Czech republic and a political prisoner himself said, “Hopeful causes are not necessarily those that have a promise of early success. They are those that are good in themselves and therefore worth working for.” We make God known cleverly and slowly but we do it, and the Kingdom of God will come. Jesus said it would.