

Moses and the Burning Bush

In the Sunday readings for the previous 2 weeks our Lord has been emphasizing the need to learn what it is He has taught us – the need to incorporate Revelation (transmitted through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition) into our very selves. This was the parable, for example, of the sower and the seed in last week's Gospel. What our Lord is saying is that if "His Word" does not really penetrate us, then we cannot enter the Kingdom that He has prepared for us from before the foundation of the world. This should not surprise us. How can a person possibly be happy spending eternity with someone they don't even know, or chose not to know? We cannot love what we do not know. The very reason that God gave man an intellect is to know Him, which is a necessary part of forging relation with Him. And building union with Him is the essence of getting to Heaven. So...study the faith, learn, know, become one with what I have revealed to you, is the message our Lord is giving us. To say it's important understates it. It is necessary.

Learning about God (i.e., coming to know Him) is not like memorizing the alphabet or somebody's phone number or some such thing. It is not just having information. Most of the time I have to take His teaching and really wrestle with it – like Jacob wrestling with the angel. I have to take it, ponder it over, eliminate many things that it doesn't mean, turn it over and over in mind, and so on, until finally I'm able to say: Ah, Lord, now I see! Thank you, Lord! You are a good God. It then becomes a part of me – it affects how I think, speak, and act.

The reason for this little review of the/a message from the last 2 Sundays readings is because the first reading for weekday Mass this past Wednesday and Thursday provides a tremendous example of doing exactly that – wrestling, pondering, turning over in my mind something that God has told us, until we grasp it (at least somewhat) and it has an impact on us. The first reading from the past few weekdays was from the book Exodus where God first starts speaking to Moses – from the burning bush. There is a multitude of things that can be drawn from these readings but I'd like to start with God's answer to Moses when Moses asked Him: who should I say sent me? God's reply was: I Am Who Am. God is identifying Himself (saying His name is): I Am Who Am (or I Am for short). I remember hearing this as a boy and thinking: what in the world does that mean? The first lesson to draw out of this is might be that when these kinds of questions come to our minds, we should pursue them. It is often – maybe not always, but often – our Lord prompting us to come to know Him better.

Coming back now to the name that God gave to Moses: I Am Who Am. What does it mean? Who speaks that way?! I can tell you almost certainly that I won't be able to give you a satisfactory answer! My hope, though, is to provide a little something to start thinking about, to start wrestling with, to start turning over in your mind. I can tell you that if you begin to grasp this, it will change your way of thinking. You will begin to know and appreciate God in a fuller and deeper way. You will find a greater interior peace. You will grow in the virtue of humility. Your burden will be lighter, your yoke will be much easier, even though your external circumstances do not change. Coming to understand this name of our good God and Creator is also a great counter to this infection, this scourge, of relativism that is so badly plaguing the mind of modern man.

To begin to come to some understanding of this name, let us consider the "why" questions that are so often encountered. Take a relatively simple one: sacrifice of self? Why does our Lord insist on this? He says for example: unless you take up your cross and follow Me, you can have no part of Me. Why is sacrifice of self, self-denial, necessary to get to Heaven? The first level

of answer to these why questions is simply: because God said so. That's faith. If "because God said so" is an unacceptable answer for someone, then they lack faith. But after accepting that answer, a person can go further (faith seeking understanding, as St Augustine said). So let's pursue this one. Why does our Lord say that to get to Heaven we have to deny ourselves. It's because that's the way *He* is, that's the way God is. If we consider the inner life of the Trinity what do we "see" (i.e., what has God told us about His own inner life)? Well... the Father gives Himself completely to the Son and the Son receives the Father completely (and so on); this giving of oneself completely, then, is the very nature of God, it's the very meaning of love. What does that mean in everyday life here on earth – this is what our Lord taught us by becoming man. It's what He showed us most of all in His Passion.

BUT, let us press the question further: Why is God that way? Why doesn't He just "be" another way? Why doesn't He change? And what is God's answer to that? **I AM WHO AM!** What the good God is telling us is: I am eternal and unchanging. I cannot be any other way. I have no beginning and no end. I have always been and always will be. I do not change and I cannot change. The buck stops here. This is the way it is and that's it. I am absolute reality.

When St Paul was still Saul and was persecuting the early Church (the first Catholics) our Lord told him he was kicking the goad – you're just doing yourself harm, I'm not going to change, I never change, I cannot change. I am a, and the only, self-existent being there is. I am the One, and the only One, who accounts for His own existence. All other existence flows from Me. My very essence is existence.

By telling us His name: I Am Who Am, God is telling us that this is just the way it is and it won't be and can't be otherwise. If we rebel against that, we're just kicking the goad. This is why if we take this name that God has given us and really ponder it and let it sink into our minds, we will find a much greater interior peace. We will have no peace while kicking the goad. It is, in fact, very peaceful to let this reality (He is Who is) sink into our minds.

Now note that God is saying: I am absolute reality. This is a great counter to this scourge of relativism that is plaguing and destroying our world today. The absurd, ridiculous claim of relativism (or subjectivism) is to say: there is no objective reality outside of me. The only truth is whatever I believe, it's just my opinion, my likes and dislikes, and so on; what's true to you is true to you, what's true to me is true to me. There is no absolute right and wrong, good or evil, for example. This "mentality" has not only infected moral "thinking" but now even the most basic and obvious aspects of physical reality. I Am Who Am, think about it, turn it over in your mind, and it will affect your everyday thinking, speaking, and acting.

There is another aspect of Moses first direct encounter with God at the burning bush that is worth our while considering...but we will save that for another time, maybe next week. In the meantime, you might start thinking about it: God said to Moses, take off your shoes, this is holy ground. What might we draw out of that for ourselves today?

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.