

Rev. Donato Infante III

Dec 2, 2018

This weekend forty something of our teenagers have been here on their confirmation retreat. They have come away from the world for a while...for what? To learn a lot about God, just to cram more lessons in? No. To have some class bonding? No. To check something off their to-do list as a requirement to be confirmed? No.

It is more than all of that, and since it is a new liturgical year, I also want to go back to basics. All throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the Jewish people knew the True God, and they knew his Law. They are told, though, that there will come a day when they will be sent an anointed one, a Messiah. In today's first reading, we hear about the promise of a righteous shoot from David's line. He will be a king, and many expected him to restore the Kingdom, where the Law could be followed fully. Jesus comes, and he did act like a New Moses. He went up a mountain and taught. He taught with authority. "You have heard it said, but *I* say to you." Listening to the letter of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, it sounds like Jesus brought a bunch of rules. Paul is telling them not to forget what he taught them Jesus taught.

But that is not quite the whole story. Jesus did something quite different. You see, for the Jewish people, no one had ever seen God. Even Moses was told to fall on his face and hide when God passed by. No one had ever seen the Father. This anointed one, the Messiah, the Christ, Jesus, tells us, "Whoever sees me has seen the Father." This is such a bold claim! We can see God. It's all summed up in the beginning of the first Letter of John. Listen to this

"for the life was made visible;
we have seen it and testify to it
and proclaim to you the eternal life
that was with the Father and was made visible to us."

John is saying that he is not just writing to remind the disciples of some Law. He is teaching about who God is so that they too might become witnesses to it. Or as the Second Vatican Council said, "God chose to show forth and communicate Himself..." *Himself*, not rules!

Christianity, said Pope Benedict shortly before being elected Pope, "is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism, Christianity is rather an encounter, a love story; it is an event." I am not denying that Christianity has a moral content, and neither was the Pope. It includes what we call the natural law, that which everyone knows, such as not to murder innocent people, but all of the other commandments have a context, like family rules or traditions. "Leave your shoes in the mudroom" and "We always celebrate Christmas at the grandparent's home" come

from a context of being in that family, as much of what we do does not make sense outside of belong to the family of the Church. Our rules and traditions come from our Encounter with our Master and Lord and Friend, Jesus the Christ.

Why do the teens come away from the world, giving up their phones for a weekend? To have an encounter with the Risen One whose Second Coming we await. He is a Presence now by the power of his Spirit who forms the Church into his Body to continue showing God to the world. We can have that encounter in our day to day prayer life, in the sacraments, in serving the poor, or in Eucharistic adoration, but it often takes escaping the noise of the world and going away, on a teenage confirmation retreat or something like Cursillo. What was possible for John, Peter, and Paul is possible for us today, and then having that encounter, we are sent out to reveal Christ to the world.