

The God of Being More than Doing

3rd Sunday in Lent (Year C)

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One of the hardest parts about being a priest is having to explain to someone why their prayers aren't being answered. Usually these people are sincere: Why is my mother still fighting cancer, even though I prayed for God to take it away? Why doesn't God answer my prayers by sending me a potential spouse? Did God hear my prayer for good weather today so I can play golf? These are good questions (mostly!), but ones that are hard to answer. It is almost as if I am responsible for explaining and defending why God seems so aloof to reality and to human suffering. On top of that, I realize that if I can't come up with a quick satisfactory answer, the questioner might lose interest in religion and give up on God altogether.

In today's first reading from the Book of Exodus, there is a powerful line in there from God which is helpful. When Moses stood at the burning bush trying to figure out what was going on, God spoke and said, "I have witnessed the affliction of my people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering." That last line is so crucial: "so I know well what they are suffering."

Perhaps the answer to these people who ask these questions is simply to say, "yes, God knows." God knows your situation, frustrations, needs, and concern for others. God is not aloof. "I know well what they are suffering." Part of the problem is that we have created a God who is supposed to be like a magician. Many Christians truly believe that that is God's purpose: to go against nature and preform a trick anytime we ask for it. In that sense, we are guilty for feeding into that caricature! That is

not the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. The Biblical God is not even a God of doing, but a God being itself, 'I am who am.'

God's first priority is to be. God stands with and accompanies long before doing anything. Before trying to fix, answer, control, change, correct, or heal, God first spends time simply existing and existing with us. During that time, God witnesses our afflictions and hears our cries. God comes to know well what we are suffering. It is only after we have sufficiently entered into the being of God that we can then hope for God to do something for us. But to just jump into expecting God to act and do whatever we ask for in prayer isn't Christianity. We don't control the gods. In Christianity, we let the God control us.

Before questioning why God doesn't do what we ask God to do in prayer, we have to first see a God who stands in solidarity with us.

Am I guilty of feeding into the misconception that God is supposed to be like a magician?

It is very hard to fall in love with a God who is always doing tricks. It is much easier to fall in love with a God who stands in being with us, even in our sufferings. It is only after we love the God who stands with us that we can pray to the God who can do something for us. And oftentimes, if we are patient enough (like the gardener in today's Gospel parable) that is the God who is not full of tricks, but certainly full of surprises.