

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, May 24th 2017

In the first reading from Acts we see Paul's comments to the people of Athens after he has spent some time walking around their city looking carefully at their shrines. Paul must have made quite an impression as a first century tourist! Like me, when I tour a strange or new place, Paul must have wanted to see everything, not just the well-known tourist spots. I surmise this about Paul because he reports having discovered a shrine "To an Unknown God" in verse 23. I imagine this shrine was not on the beaten path of a busy street in Athens but a small, simple shrine off on a side street. Paul affirms the people of Athens by saying in verse 22, "You Athenians, I see that in every respect you are very religious." It seems to me that they are so religious that they wanted to make sure all the religious "bases were covered." They did not want to miss any deity who would become angry because the Athenians did not recognize it, even though the deity did not have the courtesy to reveal its name to them. You have to give those Athenians credit.

At first glance, all of this religiosity might seem a bit silly to us living in the 21st century, but is it? Out of fear or ignorance do I ever seek to "cover the bases" in my religious or spiritual life? I have certainly absent mindedly recited an "Our Father" or a "God help me" or "God forgive me" prayer out of a sense of obligation to God rather than a true desire to praise or communicate with my Lord. Paul seems to understand this very human tendency in the Athenians and all humans, including myself, when he proclaims in Acts 22:24 that we do not have to pray to a unknown God but invites us to move past that fear to discover, "The God that made the world and all that is in it."

So that begs the question, how do I know this previously unknown God who created the world and all that is in it so that I might know, love and serve Him? Paul draws on the wonder of creation to describe who this previously unknown God is (how very Ignatian of him). When I asked myself the question of "who is God and how do I more deeply know God?" my mind immediately went to the story from the gospel of Luke called the road to Emmaus. This story describes how after explaining the story of salvation from the Old Testament Jesus revealed himself in the breaking of the bread or Eucharist. "Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread." (Luke 24:31) The previously unknown God became known instantly right in their midst! I, too, have the privilege of knowing God through the regular reception of the Word of God and the bread and wine of the Eucharistic table.

God wants us to know him and has gone to great lengths to reveal himself to us through the church, the Eucharist, scripture, prayer, family, friends, creation, hard times as well as good times, etc... How has a previously unknown God made himself known to you, your family, your community, and our world?