

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Jul 19th 2017

Moses fled from Egypt after he had killed a man. To escape retribution, he went into Midian, located east of the Gulf of Aqaba. He lived there for many years, and married Zipporah, the daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian. Moses became a shepherd and tended a flock of sheep that belonged to his father-in-law. This job was no easy matter. The shepherd would have to bring the flock to the nearest grass and water and move them to cooler areas as the temperatures on the plain increased. The lower slopes of a mountain or a valley may have provided more opportunity for the sheep to graze. In today's first reading, Moses had to move the flock to the slope of Mt. Horeb, the Mountain of God.

He likely was preoccupied with this task when he suddenly witnessed a strange phenomenon; a nearby bramble bush was engulfed in fire, but did not burn. When he went to investigate, the voice of God called to him, "Moses! Moses!" His answer was simply, "Here I am". God made it clear to Moses that he was on holy ground, and that he was about to send Moses on a mission that would save his people from bondage in Egypt. When Moses asked God, "who am I to lead your people?", God assured Moses that he would be with him. Moses would not have to do this alone.

The account is one that is short and simple, is easily remembered, and probably is one that we have known since childhood. It seems, however, that the drama of the account hides many deeper messages. If we meditate on this event, and place ourselves in this situation, would we react in the same way that Moses did? He no doubt set out with his flock that day anticipating only the normal challenges a shepherd may face. Most of us know what to expect when working in our own occupations. We most likely will not be signaled by a sensational miracle like the burning bush, but we should know that we are constantly in the presence of God. We are truly standing in a holy place wherever we are in God's creation. We can hear the voice of God speaking directly to us if we are open to him and listen. When we discern the presence of God, we need to be able to answer without hesitation, "here I am, Lord!" If we doubt that we are capable of what God asks of us, remember that he has promised that he will be there with us. We are never alone; we always are with God.

The gospel reading touches on the concept of knowing God. Jesus reminds us that some things are hidden from the learned and the wise, but are revealed to the child-like. The last portion of the Gospel (MT 11:25-27), "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him," I believe, tells us that God is knowable to God (in the person of Father and Son), and now to us, since Jesus wished to reveal God to us. This is an invitation to know God more personally. The alleluia for this day serves as a humble thank you to God for showing himself to us: "Blessed are you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth; you have revealed to little ones the mysteries of the Kingdom."

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