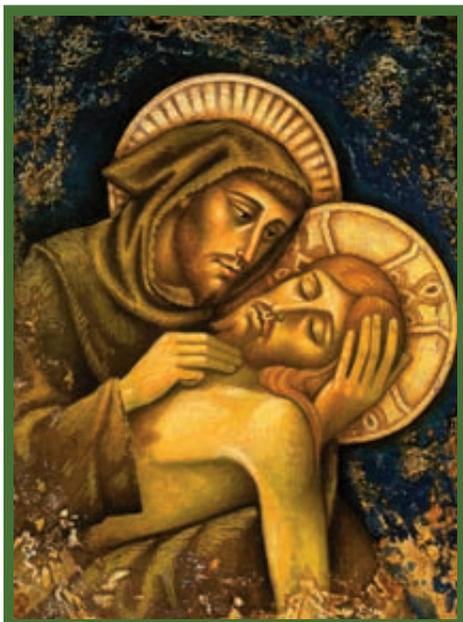


The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life

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God As Mystery



Artist: Piero Casentini

SFO GC 12,3:

The brothers and sisters should love meeting God as His children and they should let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. They should seek to discover the presence of the Father in their own heart, in nature, and in the history of humanity in which His plan of salvation is fulfilled. The contemplation of this mystery will dispose them to collaborate in this loving plan.

were you rubbed with salt, nor swathed in swaddling clothes. No one looked on you with pity or compassion to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out on the ground as something loathsome, the day you were born.

One of the phenomenal attributes of our God is God's desire for intimacy. God loves us passionately and pursues us without rest. The entire history of salvation is a story of one long chase. And God wants us to thirst after him with deep yearning.

Texts from Sacred Scripture testify to God's struggling to reveal himself as a God of love. The Old Testament in particular is full of the revelation of this kind of God as seen in this passage from Ezekiel 16: 1-15, 60,63.

Thus says the Lord GOD to Jerusalem: By origin and birth you are of the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your birth, the day you were born your navel cord was not cut; you were neither washed with water nor anointed, nor

Then I passed by and saw you weltering in your blood. I said to you: Live ... and grow like a plant in the field. You grew and developed, you came to the age of puberty; your breasts were formed, your hair had grown, but you were still stark naked.

Again I passed by you and saw that you were now old enough for love. So I spread the corner of my cloak over you to cover your nakedness; I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you; you became mine, says the Lord GOD. Then I bathed you with water, washed away your blood, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with an embroidered gown, put sandals of fine leather on your feet; I gave you a fine linen sash and silk robes to wear. I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms, a necklace about your neck, a ring in your nose, pendants in your ears, and a glorious diadem upon your head.

Thus you were adorned with gold and silver; your garments were of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. Fine flour, honey, and oil were your food. You were exceedingly beautiful, with the dignity of a queen. You were renowned among the nations for your beauty, perfect as it was, because of my splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord GOD.

Yet I will remember the covenant I made with you when you were a girl, and I will set up an everlasting covenant with you. ... I will reestablish my covenant with you, that you may know that I am the LORD.

Much as we try to understand God, the mystery we encounter is the mystery of love as exemplified in the above passage.

Our hunger in life is that we want to know God more, but not simply with our minds or intellects. We yearn to experience God's realness and presence. Instinctively we want to enter into the depths of our spirit and meet the God who dwells therein. Yet, as powerful and inviting as the inner pull for the divine can be, how do we get there? Can we, on our own, plumb those depths? The answer is: No! Catholic theologian Hans Kung explains, "God is by definition that which cannot be understood." Even if we can by reason posit the existence of God by our observation of creation and human nature, we still cannot know God on our own. God must reach across to us and invade our lives if ever we are to grow in our appreciation of the Divine One. It is God who speaks his love and reveals his love.



Brother Fire

So, how does this come about? How do we learn more about the mystery of God? Since the depth and magnitude of God's love are beyond human comprehension, God takes the initiative to break through our human limitations to reveal more of who God is. Human experience tells us that perhaps all we can ever hope for are **occasional glimpses** of God, and how awesome it is to discover that God is love. Some examples:

SFO Rule 5:

Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters ...

One evening a parish council held its regular meeting. One member of the council hated another on the board. In her thinking, there was nothing good about the person; he could do nothing right. That day, however, the individual who was filled with such ill feelings shared with all present an uncovering moment. She had been reading the Scriptures about

forgiveness and how Jesus taught the people that unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart, you will not know the Father's forgiveness of your sins. This woman had read those words so often, but they never

made an impression. All of a sudden, though, the Word penetrated her heart as if a sharp sword was cutting through all her defenses. Deep inside she was given a clarity about God like never before and



A field of poppies near Assisi.

felt an unmistakable nearness of God's love.

This led to a slow change of heart and a redirection of energies. God was breaking through and revealing a depth of compassion. God used that experience to offer the woman a glimpse into a deeply felt moment of the mystery of God's love.

A similar experience in Francis's life is his meeting a leper as he was riding outside the town of Assisi. Although Francis could not stand the sight of lepers he got off his horse, put a coin in the leper's hand and kissed him. The experience revealed a deep and tender love of God and awakened in him an ability to love all as sisters and brothers: robbers, the poor, Saracens, the arrogant, the powerful. All were deserving of respect, honor, inclusion and acceptance. Through this experience Francis received an "occasional glimpse" into the mystery of God. It touched him profoundly. As Francis wrote later in his Testament: When I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them.



Roasting chestnuts on a street in Rome.

From this experience Francis of Assisi grasped something of the mystery of God. Though simple and not well educated, he had an insight into God that was profound. He did not try to figure out God through

reason. He simply spent long hours in prayer, often in caves, mountains or places of solitude where God spoke his love.

In speaking about God as Mystery, all we can hope for are occasional glimpses. Often Francis asked: God, Who are You? No amount of intellectual pursuit could answer that question. He was challenged to accept the mystery of God in faith, and each time was plunged more deeply into God. God reached into Francis's humanness to find a way into his consciousness.

God is mystery and all we can do is accept this God into our hearts, let go of needing proofs, and walk in faith. As Francis encountered God the only option open to him was to open his heart and entire spirit to the mystery, and journey with that awareness for a lifetime.

SFO Rule 6:

They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession.

Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

*A Blessed Easter
to All!
Fr. Roch*

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