



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

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INTIMACY IN THE LOVE OF GOD

By Fr. David C. Robinson, S.J.

An Excerpt From Today's Reading

Moses did exactly as the LORD had commanded him. On the first day of the first month of the second year the Dwelling was erected. It was Moses who erected the Dwelling. He placed its pedestals, set up its boards, put in its bars, and set up its columns. He spread the tent over the Dwelling and put the covering on top of the tent, as the LORD had commanded him. He took the commandments and put them in the ark; he placed poles alongside the ark and set the propitiatory upon it. He brought the ark into the Dwelling and hung the curtain veil, thus screening off the ark of the commandments, as the LORD had commanded him.... Whenever the cloud rose from the Dwelling, the children of Israel would set out on their journey. But if the cloud did not lift, they would not go forward; only when it lifted did they go forward.

EXODUS 40:16-21, 36-37

Reflection

Throughout the narrative of Moses' encounters in Exodus, we are met with a profoundly concrete sense of the reality of God. However, through the centuries, into the emerging Christian era, the 'presence' of God becomes associated with a variety of 'attributes,' and the tangible, palpable experience of God with the people receives less attention, as religious identity focuses more on the transcendent dimensions of divinity than the 'domestic' immediacy of a God-with-us. Philosophical and theological reflection shines its attention more on the immutable, omniscient, omnipresent, and incomprehensible qualities of God. Not so with Moses! Reverence and devotion are intrinsic to his sense of awe in the divinity, but the relationship is vibrantly alive with a sense of personal relationship. This became the frame for the developing faith life of the Hebrews through the Exodus and beyond.

In today's passage from Exodus, we see Moses erecting the place of Dwelling for God (*mishkan*), the tabernacle that is to be a portable precursor to what would later become the Temple in Jerusalem. It is intended to be an actual place of abiding for God through the lengthy odyssey of the people to the Promised Land. Within is a sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, where the Ark of the Covenant resides. In this Ark are the two stone tablets of the Commandments gifted to Moses on Mt. Sinai. There is also an altar of incense on which perfumed offerings to God might be offered. Contained within all these symbolic artifacts is the core of the evolving faith of the people—an acknowledgment of the Covenant commandments that frame life in community, and a grounding for ritual that will shape the devotional life that blossoms in the future Temple of Solomon. All of these elements reflect the vitality and personal connection to the divine that shape what becomes the faith of Judaism. This is not to say that, through the centuries, the communities do not experience fluctuations between fervent faith and legalism. However, the foundational sense of the living presence (*shekhinah*) remains as a corrective to formalism.

As we turn our gaze to the history of Catholic Christianity, we observe a long emergence of the faith tradition that we experience today. Over centuries, the Church labors to integrate the cultural, social, and religious lineages from the Jewish, Hellenic Greek, and Roman communities. In the great Councils of the early centuries, we discover a major emphasis on the attributes of God in salvation history, the role of the incarnation, the resurrection, etc. Due to an emphasis on abstract 'truths,' the nature of the personal relationship of the Christian with God does not attract the same sense of intimacy and immediacy that is sparked during the Hebrew journey with their God from the time of the Exodus. However, communities of faith invariably search for the inner world of

intimate and spiritual depth in their walks with God. As the early agape meals evolve into the worship rituals that become what we call the Mass, the depth of connection to the risen life of Jesus leads to the sense that the ‘real presence’ of the Risen One is an intrinsic part of what the Blessed Sacrament is in the community of the faithful. This presence is a direct link to their connection with God in the Church. By the 3rd century, monastic communities begin the practice of ‘reserving’ the sacrament in a ‘tabernacle’ after Mass ends. Initially, this becomes a source of communion for the sick. By the 11th century, the practice becomes more universal, and ultimately a focus of prayer and devotion among the faithful.

These two histories of religious development illustrate our very human desire to be united more completely with the love and the mystery of the God who draws us into the fullness of saving grace and communion. As Augustine notes: “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.” We create the structures of creed and doctrine to help form a united body of faith that grows in union with the God who draws us. But, ultimately, our faith is a fruit and mystery of love—a love so immense and embracing that there is no human invention or conception that can grasp the enormity of what has become our inheritance and the legacy of the divine intention calling us to fulfillment of the promise, flowering since human creation began. Our hearts know what our minds cannot conceive. Throughout time, these very hearts have urged us to surrender to the intimacy of God’s love, to the tender touch that leads us to freedom and unity as the family of God.



Moses Comes Down from Mount Sinai
Engraving by Gustave Doré

For Pondering

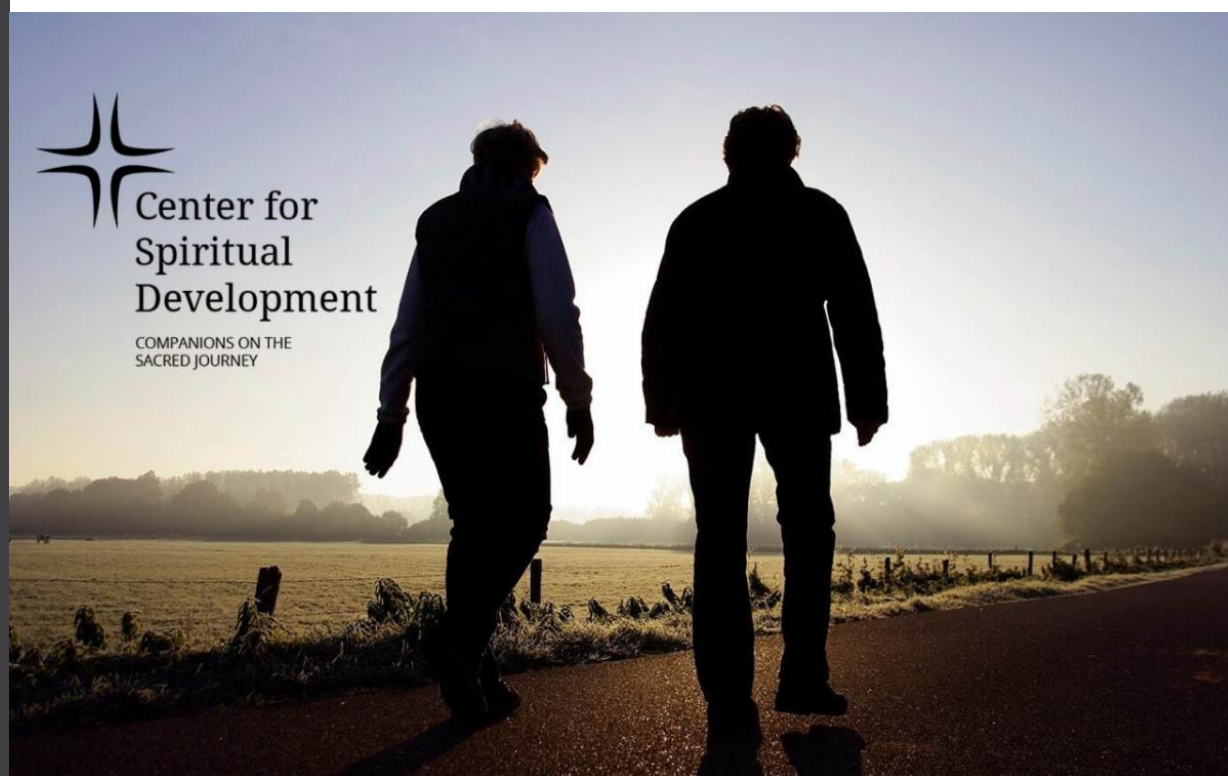
- How have you experienced the loving touch of God in your life of prayer and spiritual growth?
- What have you discovered in your Church community that encourages you to follow the urgings of your heart as you follow your vocational

path?

- Are there aspects of your religious growth that encourage you to support the yearnings of others in the Church?

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