

19 October 2014 25th Sunday after Pentecost

Exodus 33: 12-23

Psalm 99

1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10

Mathew 22:15-33

[Proper 24A/Ordinary 29A/Pentecost +19 October 19, 2014](#)

The first reading gives us a seemingly trivial question to ponder: “18 Moses said, *“Show me your glory, I pray.”* 19 And he [The Lord] said, *“I will make all my goodness pass before you.....* 20 But,” he said, *“you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”* 21 And the LORD continued, *“See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23 then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”*”

Why can we not see the face of God?

Following this strange dialogue Moses is only allowed to see God’s back. However this narrative is only bizarre if we consider it as an actual event instead of seeing it as a contemplative encounter for Moses. The narrative, when seen as a dreamscape, invites us into the same contemplative space in which Moses found himself.

It illustrates the Zen nature of Moses, and his contemplative deepening.

The Buddhist monk Linji Yixuan would tell followers *“If you meet the Buddha, kill him”*; for his understanding was that thinking about the Buddha as an entity or deity is delusion, not awakening.

Zen master Shunryu Suzuki wrote, *“Kill the Buddha if the Buddha exists somewhere else. Kill the Buddha, because you should resume your own Buddha nature.”*

These two contemplatives, from an entirely different tradition have their own way of speaking the truth that Moses discovers in relation to the Divine face of God: *“you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”*

Returning to the Old Testament narrative, Moses receives an important insight, a simple truth that is clearly articulated within the text: *“My presence will go with you”*.

Moses has realised himself as ‘divinely known’; *“The LORD said to Moses.... “you have found favour in my sight, and I know you by name.”*”; Moses realises the same insight that Paul speaks of in his opening address to the Thessalonians: *“we know, brothers and sisters that God[he] has chosen you”*

Both Moses and Paul see the presence of God ‘with, and ‘within’.

How then do we:

Know ourselves as known?
Know ourselves as chosen?
And know the presence of God with us?

The gospel helps us today, for whenever we have a dialogue with the Pharisees, we are really listening to our own doubts and unknowing that are being voiced.

The question is asked of Jesus: “*what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?*”; and obviously this is not an audit of Jesus by the tax department.

This question calls into question the life orientation of Jesus;
To what do you contribute?
In what and who do you invest?
Are you confined by and/or obedient to the ways of the world?
Do you comply with cultural norms?

The question is posed within the gospel for it is a question for us to ask of ourselves.

And the answer from Jesus offers two actions and both of the actions are about ‘giving’;
“*Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's and [Give] to God the things that are God's.*”

When we contemplate the answer for ourselves, the answer that we make manifest in our lives then we learn something of who we are; and our answers give us some insight into our life orientation.

To what do you contribute?
In what and who do you invest?
Are you confined by and/or obedient to the ways of the world?
Do you comply with cultural norms?

Perhaps you might take some time during the week ahead to look at this whole exercise.

Take three circles, maybe even draw them out on paper, one represents you (a circle of ‘me’), the second represents the world and the third represents God.
Then one at a time contemplate the three attributes of Time, Talents and Money; in turn discover how much of each you give to each of the three circles.

Do the exercise twice, once to discover the ‘on the surface’ answer, the experiential answer, and then again to seek the place, or orientation within that identifies a divine presence.

Be aware that there some obvious overlaps, and don’t dismiss the process as all about the offertory; that is however a good example of overlap. The money we put in the plate each week gives to each of the three circles:

It gives to the ‘me circle’ as it pays for the operations of St Paul’s and that benefits us. It gives to the ‘world circle’, for the presence of St Paul’s in the world is arguably of benefit to the

wider community. And it gives to the 'God circle' in that it should facilitate our 'divine works' through our ministry and giving to others.

There may also be overlap in our time allocations; those who work as teachers for example will find an overlap, as some percentage of time would be for the 'me circle' as it earns a salary that enables 'me' to live; it also contributes to the world as it serves the common good and it could give to the 'God circle' for some teachers come from a knowing that their vocation is a 'divine activity'.

We will however find that much of our time, talents and money gives more clearly into one or other of the three circles.

As we complete, and contemplate the exercise we might well be surprised, embarrassed and/or delighted at what we discover.

Of the three circles, the 'me circle, the 'world circle' and the 'God circle' which one is more filled by our time, which one receives our talents and where have we invested our money?

The second part of the gospel reading once again gives us an opportunity to explore and encounter our life direction.

The Sadducees are 'sad us see' as they don't believe in the resurrection; and that could also suggest to us that the majority of Christians are really closet Sadducees; for hoping for resurrection is very different to believing in it.

Sadducees like most of contemporary humanity, both the faithful and those of no faith; have little insight into the resurrection that was the enlightenment revealed through Jesus.

In a conversation with an atheist earlier in the week, we found ourselves sharing our common ground. Both of us spoke of a seeing beyond the 'what is' of the world and of seeing beyond a self that is the obvious sense of self... we spoke of the 'other' reality we glimpse in our dreams and we shared a knowing that there is more... more to give, more to realize and a more 'divine' life that is very much with us in the here and now...

We shared an appreciation of a 'fuller' version of life to that which we hold on to....

Perhaps we were articulating the reality of resurrection, the life we can live when we can let go, and give less to the emperor and more to God...

*This is love: to fly toward a secret sky, to cause a hundred veils to fall each moment.
First to let go of life. Finally, to take a step without feet.*

Rumi