

TEXT: John 14:23-29
THEME: God resides with us, in us
SUBJECT: Presence/Absence
TITLE: At Home With God

Sixth Sunday of Easter
26 May 2011
Messiah Moravian
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Our text answers a question not included in our reading. Judas, not Iscariot, asks Jesus, “Lord, how is it you will reveal yourself to us and not to the world?” Answer: those who love me and keep my word will see what others can’t. Love is the medium of revelation. No love, no vision.

The implications of this understanding of revelation are manifold. To grasp what is being said by John is to gain a foothold on mount Sinai, on mount Carmel.

When someone denies the reality of God, launching into philosophical arguments about the nature of reality, however entertaining and enlightening, will not reveal God to the questioner. When our own hearts are troubled by doubts about God, reading the latest “proofs” for the existence of God may not calm our fears.

Simone Weil studied philosophy at the Sorbonne at the same time as Simone Beauvoir. Beauvoir authored *The Second Sex*, a pivotal text in the movement for equality for women. She was very competitive, intellectually. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who enjoyed a distinguished career as a philosopher, Simone Beauvoir and Simone Weil took the examinations in general philosophy the same year. Maurice placed third, Beauvoir second, Weil first.

Weil repeatedly recited, like a prayer, George Herbert’s poem, “Love.” During one of these recitations, Christ himself, she reports, became present to her. “In my arguments about the insolubility of the problem of God,” she wrote, “I had never foreseen the possibility of real contact, person to person, here below, between a human being and God.

“In this sudden possession of me by Christ, neither my senses nor my imagination had any part; I only felt in the midst of my suffering the presence of a love, like that which one can read in the smile on a beloved face.”

Love is the medium of revelation. Love does not merely think, feel, desire. It does think, feel, desire, but it is fulfilled in action. The love that reveals keeps, lives by, the words of the Lord of love.

It is easier to conclude God is dead, or on an extended sabbatical, than it is to obey the command to love just as we are loved. As Bonhoeffer put it, “If someone tells you they lack faith, you don’t tell them to believe harder. You tell them to obey God.” Through obedience God will create faith, a faith that both sees and knows what is hidden from disobedience.

In April of 1940, 20 months before entering the monastery, Thomas Merton was visiting Cuba. Outside the door of the Church of St Francis in Havana, a seller of lottery tickets was yelling so loudly you could hardly hear the bells calling the faithful to worship. As Merton entered the front door of the church, a group of school children filed in one of the side doors two by two and began taking their places in the front of the church. Mass had already begun, and the priest was reading the epistle.

The children sang. The priest began the recitation of the creed, “Yo, Creo . . .” “I believe. . .” which immediately all the children took up after him with such loud and strong and clear voices, and such unanimity and such meaning and such fervor that something went off inside of Merton like a thunderclap.

In Merton’s own words, “. . .without seeing anything or apprehending anything extraordinary through any of my senses, I knew with the most sublime and unquestionable certainty that before me, between me and the altar, somewhere in the center of the church, up in the air (or any other place because in no place), but directly before my eyes, or directly present to some apprehension or other of mine which was above that of the senses, was at the same time God in all His essence, all His power, God in the flesh and God in Himself and God surrounded by the radiant faces of the thousands million uncountable numbers of saints contemplating His Glory and Praising His Holy Name.

“And so the unshakable certainty, the clear and immediate knowledge that heaven was right in front of me, struck me like a thunderbolt and went through me like a flash of lightning and seemed to lift me clean up off the earth.

“To say that this was the experience of some kind of certainty is to place it as it were in the order of knowledge, but it was not just the apprehension of a reality, of a truth, but at the same time and equally a strong movement of delight, great delight, like a great shout of joy and in other words it was as much an experience of loving as of knowing something, and in it *love and knowledge were completely inseparable*.

“All this was caused directly by the great mercy and kindness of God when I heard the voices of the children cry out “I believe” in front the altar of St Francis. . . .it was in no way an extraordinary kind of an experience, but only one that had greater intensity than I had experienced before. These movements of God’s grace are peculiar to nobody, but they stir in everybody, for it is by them that God calls people to Him, and He calls everybody.”

“Those who love me,” Jesus says, “will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.”