

THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR “A”

Where is God? That is the question the second grade teacher put before her students. And one student immediately raised his hand to offer an answer. Without hesitation the teacher called on him and once again asked, “Where is God?” The little boy responded, “God is in the bathroom.” Appearing dumbfounded by this response the teacher rhetorically asked, “In the bathroom?” “Yes,” said the student. He explained, “Every morning my father stands in the hallway of our home, knocks on the bathroom door, and asks, ‘My God, are you still in there?’”

“Where is God?” That is the question the Israelites ask Moses in today’s first reading from Exodus. The Israelites suffered oppression, slavery, and the threat of total extinction at the hands of the Egyptians. God, in his goodness, freed them from this burden. God set them free and with the help of Moses began to lead them to the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. On their way through the desert to the Promised Land, however, the Israelites became thirsty. In that thirst, they complain to Moses, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?” They found water, but it was bitter. What is more, they faced not only a lack of food and water, but also the fierce attack of the Amalekites.

Interestingly enough, Moses calls the place where their complaints occurred Massah and Meribah – names which mean testing and quarreling, respectively. In this time of testing, the Israelites complained, quarreled, and wondered, “Where is God?” In fact, they ask, “Is God in our midst or not?” God provided a host of miracles for the Israelites, but sadly they forget all of this and complained to the point of almost giving up. They had become “fair weather followers,” but when the storms of adversity emerged with all of their inconveniences they fell apart. As the story unfolds, we see God is always there and he never leaves them.

“Where is God?” My brothers and sisters, as we live out our journey, that is a question we all ask at one time or another. It is easy to trust that God is present when things are going well. But when the storms of life blow, rattling our foundation, like illness, the death of a loved one, job loss, rejection, we fall prey to complaining and quarreling and wondering. “Is God in our midst or not?” Like the Israelites of old, we forget all the wondrous things our God has done for us and when difficulty emerges we murmur to God and one another. This reality is further complicated by today’s modern world which is governed by and geared toward convenience. But guess what, FAITH is NOT meant to be convenient. Sadly, the commitment of faith has given way to the convenience of faith.

“Where is God?” That is a question that scores of people are answering in the Lenten Season as they seek baptism in and/or full initiation into the Catholic Church. During the last two weekends at St. Paul’s Cathedral before Bishop Wuerl, hundreds of people, three from our parish, have publicly declared that “God is in the Holy Roman Catholic Church.” He can be found in the Scriptures, Tradition and Teaching Authority of the Church. The Vatican II Document on the Sacred Liturgy, is even more specific in as much as it states that God is present in the priest, the Word, the Eucharistic species of bread and wine and the Eucharistic Assembly. Essentially that is you and me.

“Where is God?” Our Holy Father Pope John Paul II in proclaiming this year as the Year of the Eucharist, reminds us all of something we forget, take for granted, and ignore, namely that God is present indeed in the Eucharist. That is what when we approach the altar to receive the body and blood we are to bow in response because the Lord is in our midst. That is also why the Church in her infinite wisdom obligates us to attend Mass every Sunday and receive the Eucharist – for it is real food and real drink – the bread of eternal life. And as we continue our journey and encounter struggles, difficulties, and inconveniences, nothing will help us more than Jesus, in the most Holy Sacrament on the altar.

“Where is God?” He’s right here in the Eucharist. We will soon receive him and every Wednesday night at Holy Hour we can visit Him and adore Him.

You know while we often ask in our humanness, “Where is God?” it is important to note that God has a question of his own for each and every one of us, namely, “Where are you? Are you with me or not?”

And so, “Where are you?” If any of us feel estranged alienated, or apart from God, there is good news. Not only is there the Eucharist, but there is also the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the great Sacrament of love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Where is God? He’s everywhere, but particularly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, where he hates the sin but always loves and forgives the sinner.