

## The God of Compassion

- 30<sup>th</sup> Sunday  
- October 29, 2017  
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If I come upon a good bumper sticker on a car I tend to use it for all it is worth in my speeches and homilies. I certainly did that with the bumper sticker I came upon one morning driving back from my usual walk around Green Lake: “Don’t Believe Everything You Think.” I milked that for all it was worth. I now have heard of another bumper sticker which I want to use as my launching in this homily. It reads: “Remember Only One Seven Billionth of All of This Is about You!” 7,000,000,000+ people are on our planet, all of equal worth, all cherished by God; each of us just one of them. Yet God loves each of us as if we were the only one.

We also should realize that we are on one middling planet of a star we call the Sun, and that the next closest star is only 25 trillion miles away, and there are about 200 million stars in our one galaxy which we call the Milky Way, and that there are—give or take a few million—about 1 billion galaxies. So is our planet any more than a grain of sand in a cloud of dust in the eyes of God the Creator? Yet God loves each of us on this grain of sand of a planet totally, as it were, with “all his heart, and soul, and mind”.

That bumper sticker, “Remember Only One Seven Billionth of All of This Is about You!”, puts us in our place. If we are honest, isn’t it hard not to think of ourselves as the center of the universe? We are not. God is. God the Being, the Beauty, not before but behind the Big Bang, is the Center of and the Presence in love to the whole universe and to each of us in our miniscule reality, though it is immense in his attention and love.

The gospel today has Jesus quote the Hebrew Scriptures upon which he fed, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” Is it only a curiosity that Jesus never elsewhere in all of the gospels tells us to love God, other than in this quote from the Hebrew Scriptures? He tells us to love him, Jesus, and to love others, but does not tell us to love God. Is it that he knew it was impossible for a human being to know what they were doing in loving God, that God is much too big, too unknown, too much mystery for us to have any confidence in what we would be doing in loving God. Certainly Jesus also knew that the word “love” in the scripture he quoted about loving God, does not mean what we mean by “love”, but more something like “take your stand on God”, “cling to God”, “trust God totally”, “believe in God with your whole life”, “depend on God”. That we can do, even if love is beyond us.

It is all the other direction for Jesus. Not about our loving God but about God loving us, loving us into being, loving us in our being, loving us in our loveliness and unloveliness, making us lovable by his love of us. You wouldn’t think God could do that because of our smallness, but God can. The proof that he can and how he does love us is shown to us in Jesus, who is the revelation of the love of God for us, each of all 7,000,000,000+ of us on this grain of sand of a planet.

Jesus does not stop there in this direction or plunge of love from God to us—rather than from us to God—by saying we should show we do love God by loving others the way God loves us. That is the only fully real way of loving God—whom we cannot get enough of a grasp on to love—to love others whom we can grasp and to do so in the way God embraces us.

The first reading today says we should show compassion to the alien, to the widow, to the orphan, to the one in debt to us, to the one who does not have more than one cloak to sleep under... why?... because that is how God treated his people who themselves were aliens, orphans, widows, debtors, unprotected... treated them with compassion. Here is the central revelation in our sacred scriptures about who God is, how God acts towards us, and how we should act toward others. God is perfect in compassion. Compassion is God's very nature. When Jesus says, "Be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect", he says, "Be compassionate as your heavenly father is compassionate!" Isn't "compassion" the right word for God's love toward us in our smallness? What else could say it better given who God is and given who we are? As the author of the Book of Wisdom says, to paraphrase him, "God, because you are all-powerful, because you can do all things, you show your power by choosing to have compassion on all things, on all that you have made."

What follows, Jesus says, is that we should have compassion on others as God has compassion on us. Pope Francis has it right. He is the Pope of Compassion or Mercy because he, at the age of seventeen, experienced God's compassion and mercy on himself and right then and there gave over his whole life to showing God's compassion and mercy to all. If we look at our own experience aren't we in our smallness, our unloveliness, our alienhood, our orphanhood, our widowhood, our indebtedness, our uncoveredness, also able to know we have experienced God's compassion on us. If you can't get ahold of how God loves you, try getting ahold of how God has compassion on you. It is easier to do because you are far more likely to be aware of your smallness than to be confident of your loveableness.

Dwell on that in your experience, then live that same compassion toward others. Perhaps not all 7,000,000,000+ but those whom you can know, and embrace, and love in a practical way in deeds of compassion, whether near at hand or far away. Thank God, praise God, pray to God, repent before God, surrender to God—the God you can't grasp except in Jesus—but "love" God by practical deeds of compassion toward others, loving Jesus in them as well as loving him in himself. To do so is to fulfil the greatest commandment of all of our sacred scriptures and to live out the Eucharist we celebrate.