

HOLY TRINITY
June 7, a.D. 2009
John 3: 1 – 17

Nobody can induce the encounter with God by himself or induce it in another person. It is given to us only by God himself. Revelation is an event over which we have no control, an event that occurs when I know him only as He makes himself known to me. ... I know him only as He makes himself known to us. So writes the theologian from the University of Erlangen, Paul Althaus in his book *Die Christliche Wahrheit*, the Christian Truth. Dr Althaus is correct in saying this, not because he was a very wise man and excellent theologian at the University of Erlangen, but because God says so in other words. Holy Scripture says that God dwells in a light unapproachable. (1 Timothy 6:16) Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father. (John 6:46) No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him. (John 1:18) All things have been delivered to Me by My Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. (Matthew 11: 27)

This left Isaiah in a strange place when he saw God sitting on his high and exalted throne and the hem of his robe filling the temple. He saw seraphs flying around in the smoke of God's holy presence and heard their piercing hymn of praise Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory. Their song alone caused an earthquake and shook the very foundations of the temple.

Isaiah didn't ask for this encounter with the thrice-holy God. No wonder that when Isaiah did see God in all of His glory, he prepared for his death.

Isn't it strange that we long to see God and know that he is around when we need him and when Isaiah did see him, he cried out in anguish: Woe to me! I am ruined. For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.

So the only way that we know anything about God is if God makes himself known to us. We can and should ask for it, but it can only happen when God actually does it.

That makes belief in God a slippery thing. A person may think he or she has a pretty good handle on God, spend much time in the study of God's word, fervent in prayer, descended from a well respected Christian family, and be highly decorated as an exemplary citizen and still know very little about God.

Nicodemus was such a person. He came from a fine Jewish stock, studied the scriptures, a Pharisee and ruler among the Jews. He had lots to brag about but knew very little about God. He freely admitted that the miracles of Jesus came from God but could not see that Jesus was God. And when Jesus spoke to him about a kingdom that was not of this earth or about being born from above, he didn't have a clue.

Nicodemus was stuck in the Jewish way of thinking that understood God's kingdom to be here on earth, the very dirt that God promised father Abraham in Canaan, which happens to be the land that the Israelis and Palestinians are fighting about today. Nicodemus had no clue what Jesus was talking about that the only way to come into God's kingdom was to be born by water and the Holy Spirit. What was important for Nicodemus was that one is born of good Jewish ancestry and then follows the commands of God in order to remain in God's kingdom.

For Nicodemus being born in the flesh was everything. For Jesus it meant nothing. As long as Nicodemus tries to look at God through his Jewish fleshly eyes, he will never encounter God.

The high Feast Day of the Holy Trinity is not here for us to figure out the mysteries of God's being, how he is three in one. Or to pick up a three-leaf clover as St. Patrick is said to have done, to think of the Trinity and say I've got it and finally understand him. Woe be to us if that is our wish.

Instead of asking how God is, God tells us as he told Nicodemus of what he does. First of all, he tells us we are not fit to live in Eden but then he opens the paradise of heaven by the cruel and bitter death of Christ on the cross. Then he tells us to take water and make it touch us and say, I baptize you in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit and calls this a new birth from heaven. His cross and his baptism are mysteries that bring us life.

What an amazing God he is. He corrects our fleshly way of thinking and reveals to us that new life in God just as any encounter with God is God's doing alone. Jesus

was there for Nicodemus as he is here for us not to discuss but to teach. Nicodemus is there to hear and learn not to figure it out or encourage God to come to him through his exemplary life and bloodlines.

The Holy Spirit is the mysterious breath that blows new spiritual life into us through the mysteries of our Lord's Cross, Holy Baptism and His Supper. These mysteries are much like God's plan of salvation for poisoned Israel in the wilderness after the snakes had unleashed their venom. God commanded Moses to erect a bronze serpent on a pole and everyone bitten by a snake who gazes upon the bronze serpent would be healed.

What an amazing God! First it was God who unleashed those serpents bringing death and pushing the tormented to the brink of despair. Then God brings salvation not in any medicinal antidote like anti-venom serum, but in a look upon a cross in the desert. Just look upon that cross and you too will be saved. God provides life in a thing of death, the cross.

Christ on the cross is a stumbling block for those who seek signs of power and foolishness to those wanting logical and rational solutions to the problems of sin and death. First God must overcome our logic and pride and humble us in repentance, which is His gift to you. Then God gives us the sign of a cross for the healing of the nations.

God put the holy cross upon you at your baptism. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born from above. Who is the only one born of a virgin, conceived by the Holy Spirit and without sin? And it is Christ who gives you his sinless birth from heaven in baptism. His birth is your birth. His death to sin is your death. His life is yours!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen