

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Liturgy challenges our understanding of God. Scripture teaches that God is mystery, not in the sense of something to be figured out like a murder mystery, but in the sense that persons are mysteries. If we want to understand the mystery of God, we need to reflect on the mystery of human persons.

No matter how well we know another person, we never know that person completely. The best relationships in our lives, the most enduring relationships, are those in which we always have a sense of the mystery of the other person, when we are fascinated with each other, when we look at each other with wonder and awe. Many times, however, we are not comfortable with mystery. We want to be able to figure out other people. We want them to be predictable. We want to remake them into images of ourselves, into extensions of ourselves.

The same is true in our relationship with God. We want a God who is completely understandable and predictable. Scripture tells us that God created us in his own image and likeness. We seek a God whom we can remake into our image and likeness. Over and over, however, God reminds us in Scripture that he is not like us, that his ways are different from ours. Today's readings suggest at least three ways that God confounds our expectations of him.

The first reading strongly suggests that the presence of God cannot be limited to particular places, times, or activities. Medad and Eldad were not in the gathering, but the spirit came to rest on them outside the gathering place. Today some Christians, for example, would confine God's presence primarily to church, to Scripture, and to Liturgy. When we limit God's presence to any particular place, time, or activity, our awareness of the mystery of God is diminished. God is present everywhere, in every facet of human experience. Therefore, to understand the mystery of God, we need to recognize his presence in nature, in art, in poetry, in classical and contemporary music, in ourselves and others, in relationships and community, and in our personal and interpersonal experiences.

The first reading and the Gospel strongly suggest that we cannot limit God's freedom to choose whom he wishes to carry on his saving work in the world. Joshua objected when Medad and Eldad prophesied. Jesus' disciples objected when a man who was not one of them used Jesus' name to expel demons. In truth, God chooses all kinds of different people to bring his love to the world. God chooses men and women of all races and ethnicities, old and young, rich and poor, liberals and conservatives, Catholics and non-Catholics, Christians and non-Christians, capitalists and socialists, the good and the not so good. More importantly, God chooses and calls each of us by name to be his head and his heart, his hands and his feet, in the world today. For Christians, our career choices are always vocational responses to God.

Today's second reading reminds us that God's values and our values are not necessarily the same. Money, possessions, power, prestige—values to many people—simply are not values to God. The mystery of God (three Persons in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) suggests that persons and relationships are the authentic human values. Persons are to be valued, cherished, and loved; money and things are to be used in the service of persons and relationships.

My brothers and sisters, God is mystery; human persons are mysteries; the interplay between God and us is also a great mystery.