

## The Second Sunday of the Epiphany Season

### Exodus 33:12-23

*I know you by name, the Lord had said to Moses, as Moses himself reminded Him, as we hear it today, and you have also found favour in my sight.*

What a wonderful thing to have heard from Him who is Lord and Master of all things in Heaven and on earth, and of life and death. *I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.* What, then, could anyone have to worry about? As the holy Apostle Paul writes it, *if God is for us, who can be against us?* Well, the answer is in the question, is it not, since *God is in the question.* If *God is for us,* then no one or nothing can be against us; well, no one or nothing that really matters!

And yet Moses could not be content to have heard this from Him who is Lord and Master of all things in Heaven and on earth, and of life and death: *I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.* Even this was not assurance enough for him. As we hear it today, Moses said to the Lord: *See, You say to me: 'Bring up this people', but You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said: 'I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.'*

God had given His promise to Moses, and assured him of His favour. And still, Moses was not comfortable to take on the task God had laid out for him. He needed somebody else to be with him to assist and assure him; somebody *real,* that is, or in other words: somebody other than God.

How easily even those who believe in God forget that He is real, and that as such, His promises pertain to real life.

He knows us by name. He knew us and loved us before all things began, says Holy Scripture, as He *chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him and find favour in His sight.* And He knows us by name indeed, for He has had us baptised into His own name, and into Himself, that we might be one with Him in His goodness so as to find favour in His sight. As His Christians we know this, and we believe it, because He Himself makes us to believe it, and that is what makes us His Christians to begin with.

And yet, so easily, that which we believe and know to be true we relegate to a separate realm, one that is not *really real,* not of the real world. We come to think that what we believe is only something we imagine, something that it would be irresponsible for us to actually act upon in real life.

It is a common conception in our day and age that Christians, and other religious people, also, actually are very well aware themselves that what they believe is not really true, that they are playing a game, that they only *pretend* to believe what they believe, because it is precious to them, somehow, to believe that they believe it. *Atheism* has become the assumption of politics and public life; only therefore can it come easily to government officials to declare worship and life with God *not essential*, and deem Christians to be but unreasonable and irresponsible troublemakers when they are unwilling to set aside what they know, in faith, to be the Word and will of God.

So common is this conception of the faith that even many Christians fall victim to it, even when it comes to the life of the Church. Some come to think that for the sake of the Church and the faith we need to set the faith aside, and the Word and will of God. After all, even as Christians, and as a congregation we live in the *real world*, do we not? And already by saying that, and thinking it, we accept the premise that the real world is one in which God does not exist, and to which His Word and will do not apply, or His promises.

Well, according to the Psalm it is the fool who says in his heart, that is: in his innermost thoughts, that *there is no God!*

To Moses God said: *My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.* God claims to be real, and present in our real lives. And to believe that He is is what it means to believe in God, is it not? If God is not real in Himself, if He is something we must make up for ourselves, then He is not really God. That is just common sense; well, it is more than common sense: it is the Word of God!

Even assured of this, though, by the Word of God, Moses was not satisfied. *Now, therefore, if I have found favour in Your sight, he said, please show me now Your ways, that I may know You in order to find favour in Your sight.*

Even those who are convinced that God is real can have a hard time being content to trust in His promises. Although God had made Himself known to Moses and assured Him of His favour, what Moses sought from Him was still guidance and aid to *earn* His favour; although God had already said: *I know you by name, and you have also found favour in my sight.*

It is in our nature not to trust in God, that He will give us all things good out of His goodness. *Sin* is in our nature; and it is the very nature of sin *not* to trust in God so as to be content to have all things good given to us out of His goodness, to allow Him alone to be God, and the Giver of all things good.

Instead, we believe the ancient lie of the evil one, that we should be like God and master good and evil ourselves and win goodness and good for ourselves, in spite of the promise of God, that He will give us all things good out of His goodness, and in spite of what He teaches all through Holy Scripture, that all things good and all goodness must be given to us by God, or it will not be truly good, or true goodness, since God alone is God, and we are not.

This is the very nature of sin. And sin is in our nature. Therefore is it that we constantly need to have the goodness of God set before us. And therefore is it also that God, who knows us, as He knows all things, and knows us *in love*, that He constantly does have His goodness set before us.

*I will make all my goodness pass before you, as we hear it today that He said it to Moses, and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord'. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And so God had His goodness pass before Moses, so that Moses might know God from His goodness, not to be able to find favour in His sight, as Moses had requested, but rather in order for him to see that the favour of God was upon him already, because of the goodness of God, and for no other reason whatsoever.*

*But my face you cannot see, God also said to Moses, for Man shall not see me and live. And so He let Moses see Him only from behind, only indirectly.*

The glory of God is not for us sinners to see; not because God is petty and wishes to withhold His goodness and His glory from us, but rather because the glory of God, and His goodness, would not be good for sinners to see. *For You are not a God who delights in wickedness, as the Psalm says it; evil may not dwell with You.* The perfect goodness of God is a ferocious fire against all evil. And sin is evil, unbelief and ungodliness and impurity in us, which also makes us to *do evil*, and we do, because we are evil at heart.

We can only see God, and know Him, by having His goodness set before us; as we have in His Word of salvation, what He has done for us, out of His goodness: that the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, came to us for our salvation, to see for Himself the fullness of our sin and evil, and take it upon Himself and bear it for us, into death, condemned and crucified by the evil of sinners, and condemned by the goodness of God, and His hatred of evil.

By this Word we know God and His goodness. And by this Word God Himself is with us, and gives His salvation to us, and brings His salvation to completion in us.

*It was before your eyes, writes the holy Apostle Paul, that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law or by hearing with faith? And once again, the answer is in the question: it is by having Christ crucified portrayed to us publicly, that is: in the Word and worship of His salvation, that we have the Spirit of God given to us, who is the very innermost life of God, so that God Himself lives in us and is with us to bring His salvation to completion for us and in us; the Word of how God Himself has found us and turned His favour upon us, out of His goodness alone, and for no other reason whatsoever, and at the most terrible cost to Himself, the sufferings of the Son.*

In the Word of His salvation God declares to us what He has done to make us His own, and declares us to be that, His own, and claims us as His own, and makes us to be His own. He assures us of His favour by having His own life live in us, and His love, and makes us to know Him, at heart, and trust in His goodness, in spite of all doubt, and believe His promise that we shall not perish and die forever in His wrath, but rather live and be with Him forever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. He Himself lives in us and works in us and preserves us for His Kingdom. As He said it to Moses: *My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.*

By what He has done for us, and by what He does for us, He makes us to be free from all evil and impurity before Him, so that, when He comes in glory, we can stand before Him and see Him as He is, in all His goodness and glory.

*Beloved, we are God's children now, writes the holy Apostle John, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when He appears we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. We shall see Him in the fullness of His goodness and His glory. And His goodness and His glory shall shine upon us and transform us to be all alike to Him in His goodness and His glory.*

*We shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is. And as we live in the Word and worship of His salvation, as His Church and as His Christians, we have already begun to be conformed to His goodness and His glory. In the Word and worship of His salvation we gaze into the very goodness of God, and His goodness shines into us and drives away the darkness of disobedience and defiance and doubt. His living Word of love fills us with His love, so that we begin to become like Him. And we shall be, fully and completely, when He comes in glory, and be with Him for ever.*

Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good will toward men! Amen.