

eEaster 6 ~ May 9, 2010 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Acts 16.9-15; Psalm 67; Revelation 21.10, 22-22.5; John 14.23-29

"Pour into our hearts such love, that we, loving you in all things, may obtain your promises.."

These words, from the Collect for today, are both comforting and insightful. Comforting because to be filled with the love of God is wonderful and insightful because when we know that love of God from within, we will strive to be all it is we have been created to be.

But, there is something else that strikes me in this prayer. When I say it or hear it, I cannot help but feel the presence of *Mother*. It seems to me that it's typically Mothers who do all that love-pouring and who make the promises to which we eventually aspire.

On this Mothers' Day, I'm wondering how do we look at God. Scripture says that we are created in the image of God. What is the image of God? Why is God so often depicted in anthropomorphic terms and usually as a male *Being*. What about the Goddess represented by Sophia? Is it helpful to envision God at all? When we experience God, the presence of the Divine in the moment, what's that like?

"Then God said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...'" (Genesis 1.26)

I hasten to notice that God "says", which, of course, suggests God has a mouth from which to speak. I also notice that God is not alone, or else uses the so-called "royal We", as the author has the Creator say, "*Let us make...*" Suddenly, this is far more complicated than God's physiognomy.

In any event, humankind is made in the image of God or "according to our likeness" as I just quoted. Now, what do you think, 6'2", broad shouldered, red hair, size 10 foot? And, if we take seriously the notion of "our" as in "according to our likeness" should we add, 5'6", 130# with an hour glass figure, fashionable hair, a little rouge and lipstick?

Which image of God? It's a rhetorical question to which we have no answer other than to imagine that some how God has the body parts we have. In which case—and I'm hardly the first to say this—maybe God was actually made in the image of humankind.

But, frankly ... Scarlett ... I don't think it matters. What does matter is that we have this parental image of the Creator. The Creator creates us, in fact creates all that *IS*. In the case of male and female of most species, we create too, because we produce offspring.

In the days of our ancestors, the whole notion of procreation was ascribed to the male of the species. And, for good reason. When the ancients observed what happened between male and female, the only role observable was that of the male. There was no understanding of the biology of females—be they frogs, fruit flies, ferrets, or fem-fatales of our own species—except as the carrier of offspring.

So, if you've ever wondered how and why God is traditionally referred to as masculine, that's the reason. The male was seen—albeit incorrectly—as the starter of procreation and thus God, too, was ascribed the role of Father. I used to get offended by our non-inclusive language about God as Father until I came to understand this how and why. Now, that's not to say I like the masculine dominance in language or the presumption it engenders. And, I hope you've noticed, I rarely, if ever, use the masculine pronoun when referring to God. Some day, I trust, we will make a good shift and always refer to God without gender.

The which brings me back to depicting God in human terms—that is with head, mind, hands, heart, and as Michelangelo's image on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel blazes into the human psyche, an old guy with a long white beard and a pointy index finger.

The trouble is, when we get stuck on an anthropomorphic image of God, we also become stuck with God in single place, like on a throne in Heaven, on the Sistine's ceiling, or looking like George Burns with John Denver in a grocery store. God in human form is simply bad theology. The panentheistic—God being in everything—is impossible when God is given shape and place.

It's fascinating that some writers of Scripture—especially Genesis, Wisdom, Sirach, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, some Psalms, and Proverbs—seem to assume both male and female in the Godhead. That “royal We” I mentioned earlier. With Sophia—which means *wisdom* in Greek—we see a player in Creation and on the Divine management team: “*Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice*” (Proverbs 1.20). The feminine, it seems, actually is integral to the Divine in our Hebrew-Christian tradition.

Because I am human and have my own experiences, I choose sometimes to hear the voice of the tender, loving Mother-Creator in whose womb we were all incubated. Likewise, there are those times when the soundless timber of

the Divine's voice recalls that of Father. Yet, these voices are not separate, Rather, the Divine encompasses, includes, engenders, embraces, and *IS* male and female, not as separate at all but as a single entity.

So, for me today, as we celebrate our Mothers and Mothers' Day, I'll continue to hear the tender, loving of a Mother's voice in many of the prayers we say—like this morning's Collect. And, I think that's a good thing. How about you?

Amen.

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