

21 February 2021

### Writings: God's Mind

*I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off (Gen. 9:11)*

When I was young I was told that God knew everything. For me, that meant God knew what I was going to have for breakfast tomorrow. In other words, God had everything planned out ahead of time. As I got older, I began to question this idea. If God was love, and love has to be given and received freely, then if everything was already decided ahead of time, how could anyone really love God? Furthermore, I was told that God was all powerful. If that was true, could God change His mind. Was it possible that while God could know everything, He might choose not to do so, which would enable him to change His mind?

In today's First Reading, God makes a Covenant with Noah to never again destroy all Creation. Although many people think this story focuses on how the sinfulness of Creation was punished by a great flood, it also provides an important lesson about God's mind.

From the time the man and woman attempted to be like God by eating the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden, the relationships between humans and God, each other and Creation rapidly degenerated. The man and woman were expelled from Paradise (**Gen. 3:24**). Cain murdered Abel (**Gen. 4:8**) and his brother's blood cried out from the ground. Humans no longer easily obtained their food from the earth (**Gen. 4:12**). Like a drop of India ink released into a glass of clean water, Sin expanded gradually, until by the time of Noah, it had polluted all of Creation. God was hurt by this development and decided upon the destruction of His work. Noah, a righteous man, his family and pairs of animals were spared from this calamity through the construction of an ark. After the Flood, the smell of a sacrifice offered by Noah pleased God. The Covenant promise that Creation would never again be destroyed by water signalled a change in God's thinking. While Sin continued after Noah, God recognized there was a goodness in His Creation which would never be overwhelmed by it.

This Covid 19 pandemic has introduced a great deal of change into our thinking. We have had to learn new behaviours such as wearing a mask, keeping six feet away from others, cleaning our hands regularly and avoiding unnecessary trips within the city or to other parts of the world. On a deeper level we have had to learn we don't as much as we thought we did about diseases like this virus. We have learned we are vulnerable and can very sick very fast. We have learned going into a hospital doesn't mean we will come out of it alive or in good health. We have learned we can follow all the rules and still get sick. On an even deeper level, we have learned how life is a mystery. Many people of faith are asking where is God in all this? How could a loving God allow all this to happen? Has God changed his mind about us? (Is this some sort of divine punishment?)

While our First Reading teaches us God can change His mind, the divine recognition of the goodness of Creation is still present. It is from Creation we obtain the resources we need to care for the sick and help those suffering economically. Yet, it is up to us to use these resources effectively. Are failures to do so God's fault or ours? God has provided us with the intelligence to study Covid 19 and use the materials we have to find a vaccine to stop the spread of the virus. As the Gospel indicates, Jesus did not avoid the temptations and struggles of human existence but embraced them during his time on earth. He is present to us in this crisis, in the patient on a ventilator, the nurse working in a hospital Covid ward or someone washing the floor in a Long Term Care home as he was in the desert almost 2,000 years ago.

No one can fully understand God's mind. Yet, as the First Reading reveals, God responds to our efforts to please Him. God can see the goodness in Creation, others and ourselves to which we are often blind. When His Son came to earth, Jesus experienced the brokenness of Creation but thought it was pretty good and died on the cross to tell us it was worth saving.

The next time Covid 19 starts getting us down, we should remember it.