

Church of the Good Shepherd  
and  
St. John the Evangelist

**11<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Pentecost**  
**August 15, 2004**  
**Fr. William McGinty**

**“God is....?”**

One day a woman sat down at her dining room table and took from her pocket a letter addressed to her from her teenaged son. It read:

“Dear Mom,

I don't know if I believe in God anymore! There's a lot of bad stuff out there! God doesn't seem to do much about it. I desperately need help in my life. Constantly I seek to know what is the right thing to do, or the right way to go. If God is speaking, I can't hear him. All I hear is silence. I feel so alone at times. Even in a crowd I keep asking myself, “is this all there is?” Are we just a pile of carbon atoms sitting on a giant tennis ball spinning aimlessly in space? Mom, I'm not one of those kids who hates God, or hates life. I want there to be a God; I just can't find him. God seems important to you in your life. Maybe you would take the time to sit down and answer one question for me; then I won't bug you again.

Here's the question Mom:

“God is...?” “Oh!”, said the woman taking a deep breath. She went and put the kettle on and fumbled with her hands half wishing she still smoked so she could light up and have a long think. Instead she put on a little music and let it sweep over her. “God is?..”, she thought: “How can I answer that and not sound like the pastor preaching from the pulpit? That would put him right off. Eventually she sat down, took up her pen and began to write:

“Dear Son,

What a difficult question? I'm no theologian. All I can do is tell you what God means to me. One morning I woke up and realized I was not alone anymore. By that I mean I knew I was pregnant and was going to have a baby. I didn't need a test or a doctor to tell me. I just knew. It was as if my soul had split and part of it was now you. From that moment my life changed and I seemed to have this link, this bond with God. He seemed to be telling me “from this moment on, you and I have a special agreement. I will give you this gift and you will care for it.” Watching you grow has been a thing of wonder. Your Dad marveled at your tiny fingers and toes and your perfect nose and ears. But I saw something else from the earlier of days. I saw something else from the earliest of days. I saw the uniqueness of you. Your personality, your mannerisms, the way you gazed, your character, and somehow I realized you were not me, nor were you him, you were you and uniquely so. I searched my bible for an explanation of the way I felt. In Genesis, I found the line: “then God said, “let us make man in our own image, and in the image of God he created him.” I look at you and I love you so much and I think if God is like you, I'll just have to love him, too!

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I remembered something from the Book of Jeremiah, so I went there. Right at the beginning, God chooses Jeremiah and tells him:

“Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you were born, I sanctified you. I ordained you a profit to the nations.”

“Son,” wrote the woman, “that is precisely the way I feel about you! That I have always known you and that you and I were destined by a God who love us and needs us and is always at our side.” I think Mary must have felt the same way – as stated in Luke, chapter one, when she learned that she was to have a son. It was like as if, from that moment on, God walked with her from every sunrise to every sunset. If I ever had any doubts about God, they vanished as I watched you grow. Watching flowers and a garden grow is one thing. But the sheer magic of watching you is like watching a great artist create a masterpiece. I know I’m your Mom, and I’m a little biased, but I look at you and I think of God, the Artist, and each day I thank him!

In Corinthians, chapter two, it speaks of the mystery of God and how he is only revealed through the Spirit to those who love him. Well, I do love him! I don’t always understand him. But, I know he has a purpose and I am a tiny part in his plan. In Romans, chapter five, it says, “for while we were still sinners, God gave his son that he might die for us.” That is so enormous to grasp. I do not think I could sacrifice you for any thing or anybody. But God loved us so much that he gave up his son to die for us. That is so mind altering. I have to wonder about that love. I knew I read something about that kind of love in Corinthians, chapter 13 so I went there. It’s that part that says:

“Love is patient; love is kind; love does not envy, nor is it full of itself. Love bears all things, and endures all things. Love never fails.” If this is the love that forced God to give up his son, then God freely loves us and there is the answer to your question: “God is love.” My love for you is only a shadow of his love for both of us. Acknowledge that love and you will open the door to the reality that is the mystery of the God who loves us. Let God into your life and his love will take over. You are a little young, my son, to know that, because love, in all its multicolored dimensions, has not hit you yet. But, I want to address something else you said in your letter. You said, “If God is speaking, I can’t hear him. All I hear is silence.” Did you ever think that the very fact you say these things that God is speaking to you? Most kids don’t even have these thoughts. You are verbally seeking God, or more likely, he is seeking you. All you hear is silence. **Son!** Silence is good! Everyone else only hears noise. In silence you can hear the dew drop from a leaf hit the pond; in silence you can hear the whirl of the hummingbird’s wings in flight; in silence you can hear the beat of your own heart and the heart of someone who loves you and in silence you can hear God in the beauty of his creation and in the mind he gave you to worship and love him. Paul tells us in Romans, chapter 8, “nothing can separate us from the love of God.” Even in our deepest silence, our God is there, holding us in the palm of his hand. I know it, son, with all my being. Sometimes I just sit still and allow myself to be, to be there quietly present with my God. At other times, I reply to him by reading a Psalm. It says it better than I can: “the

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Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want, he makes me to lie down by still water, he feeds my spirit.”

I sense that you, too, are hungry for God, but more that he is beckoning you. My best advice is to go to a quiet place, walk in the woods or hills, and take your bible or your favorite poetry book. You will not find God; he will find you. And know that he will journey with you. With Love, your Mom!

Today’s readings for the 11<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Pentecost are all about God, how we can reach him, and how he reaches us.

“Am I a God near by and not a God far off?” We read in Jeremiah, “Is not my word like fire?”

The words of Jeremiah are plainly aimed at telling us that we cannot take God’s word for granted. God is speaking to us today just as he spoke to the prophets of old. The fire that God’s word kindles must burn in our hearts. It is that urge to arise and go do something for God. It is not our hunger for the word that propels us. It is God’s hunger to bring about his plan and his salvation in our lives. We belong to a continuously demanding and loving God, who will not leave us alone, but wants always to participate in our lives. The second reading, from Hebrews today, tells us that we must not rely on our own efforts to respond to God; we must ask and receive the power of his grace and his love. We are all in need of healing, physically, mentally, and spiritually. We cannot settle for being burnt out Christians when God is offering us Resurrection in the form of the living water of the Spirit. God is not saying, “Take and receive.” He is shouting, “Take this Spirit and receive my gifts.”

Jesus says, “I come to bring fire to the earth!” The fire he speaks of is the fire of the Spirit; the fire of the faith; the fire of baptism. It tells us that in Christ’s kingdom, there are no peaceful churches; there is only the burning demands of the Gospel and God pushing us on to bring his salvation to our indifferent world. Yes, God is love, but at times, that love is a burning, and demanding love that finds no rest as long as God’s children are dying, starving, beaten, persecuted, and find no justice. If we are the Gospel, then we are the answer to many desperate prayers.

“You are the hands and feet of my Gospel,” says Jesus, “do not rest till you rest in me; do not settle for a Gospel that is watered down! My Gospel is a fire that will light up the darkness where evil dwells. And it will burn the conscience of that world till you reach out and make my teaching become a reality!”

Today’s readings and the mother’s letter should challenge each one of us to search and find the God that we truly believe in. He cannot be a despot or a tyrant. He can only, in Jesus’ words, be a loving Father. He has to be a God of gentleness, and forgiveness, but also a God of justice, a God of compassion, who throws his whole being into creation that he may recover his children and that they be with him forever.

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Today's liturgy asks us, "Do you want to be on God's side?" For in the words of Dylan: "There's a battle outside and it's raging!" Poverty, war, violence, murder, and racism do not take vacations. Christians are people who pray when it's time to pray, and fight when it's time to fight. When God offers you his grace in the form of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, he is not inviting you to take a basket of goodies to a picnic. He is telling you, "Lock and load!" There is a war raging for the very souls of my children and you must fight it. And these gifts are the most powerful weapons I can give you: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and the love of God. With these gifts you can battle the darkest foe and bring my children home to me.

We live in a sad, dark world at times; a world of indifference and materialistic value. Let us shine a light on Jesus. Let us show our God to our children. Let us teach the beautiful words of **our** Holy Book, and let those words light up our path, so the kids see, know and feel that God is important and meaningful in **our** lives! Then they, too, will know who "God is...?"

Let us pray.

Lord, keep us true to your Gospel always. Where there is pain, let us be the hands of your healing. Where there is turmoil, may **we** teach your peace. Where there is ignorance, may we preach your word. Where there is injustice, may he wake from our indifference and stir the fire of your Gospel.

This we ask through the saving power of Christ, our Lord, through your Holy Spirit. "Yes, God is love, but it's a love that will set the world ablaze!"

Amen +