

April 2, 2025

Daily Reflections

Journeying through Lent



Center for Spiritual Development

THE DAY OF SALVATION AND THE WOMB OF MERCY

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Excerpts from Today's Readings

Thus says the LORD: In a time of favor I answer you, on the day of salvation I help you; and I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to restore the land.... Sing out, O heavens, and rejoice, O earth, break forth into song, you mountains. For the LORD comforts his people, and shows mercy to his afflicted.... Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.

ISAIAH 49:8, 13, 15

Jesus answered the Jews: "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work." For this reason they tried all the more to kill him, because he not only broke the sabbath but he also called God his own father, making himself equal to God.

Jesus answered and said to them, "Amen, amen, I say to you, the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for what he does, the Son will do also. For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything that he himself does.... I cannot do anything on my own; I judge as I hear, and my judgment is just, because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me."

JOHN 5:17-20, 30

Reflection

Through centuries of human social, familial, and religious interaction there has been an ongoing impulse across cultures to meet significant persons 'face-to-face,' or 'person-to-person.' It has not been enough to have communication methods or emissaries. We want to shake hands, look others in the eye, etc. In eras when distance minimizes options for closeness for so many, this desire holds great relational power. As the world has moved to rapid communication tools, audio and video devices, and global streaming software, the urgency for spatial intimacy has begun to wane. However, if we cast our gaze to millennia past, we must be sensitive to the profound importance of social intimacy that shaped relationship and identity. Scriptural narratives and language highlight the desire of God's people to know and 'see' their God with the simplicity and directness they sought in each other.

When Isaiah speaks of the 'day of salvation' (*Yeshua*), he is also evoking the intimate divine one who is the saving God (*Yeshua*) of the Chosen People. God is never 'named,' but is encountered in the unfolding of the salvific invitation and history of the relationship with the Hebrews and Israel. The very Covenant and the Law are not objects or social notions. They are the concrete 'manifestation' of God's way with us through time. In the same way, the prophet is 'given as a covenant' to all the people—a flesh-and-blood, living person of relationship, incarnating the intention of the living God among them.

It may seem sentimentally attractive that Isaiah links the 'mercy' of God for his children to the complete union of an expectant mother, so tenderly and completely linked to her infant. In Hebrew, these are the same thing! *Chesed* (mercy) is linked to *racham* (womb). God's merciful embrace of his stumbling children is as unbounded as the nurturing safety of the mother's womb. Both attributes are linked to the historical walk of the people with the one who gives them salvific life. Mercy is not merely a metaphysical dimension of divinity, nor an emotional/incarnation of godly intention. It is the organic core of how salvation infuses and elevates human history and transformation.

John's Gospel attempts to unite the cosmic fullness of God with the historic unfolding of God's saving intention in the Son. There is no contradiction in the union of the two. The theo-philosophical and the historical/incarnational are simply two unfoldings of the divine in one reality. As Jesus himself explains: **“the Son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for what he does, the Son will do also.... because I do not seek my own will but the will of the one who sent me.”**

As we explore the life and ministry of Jesus, we view him notably in the frame of his life as a product of rabbinic tradition and a voice standing in contradiction to the power and politics of the Roman Empire. His compatriots interpret his relationship to the Abba in different ways. Some view him as the Messianic hero who will help to break the imperial power, Others view him as the fulfillment of the Covenant and rabbinic tradition, promised since the time of Moses. In our days and our faith communities, we are the ones who insert distinctions into our perceptions of God among us, in our modes of prayer and ritual, while the grandeur of the love that calls and redeems us remains undivided in the one Grace that calls us beyond and through all of time. Our designs cannot unwind the wholeness of the reality that is God, and God revealed in the living mystery of the life of Jesus.





Transfiguration
Photo by David Robinson, SJ

Questions to Ponder

- In your maturing experience of God, have you found your relationship resting largely in the concepts you learned long ago, or in the growing depths of your intuition and imagination as you surrender to what faith reveals?
- How have you learned to unite the emotional and the theological in the practical living out of your religious and spiritual identity?
- What has been the most enriching aspect of your odyssey toward God in all its illuminating riches of thought, feeling, contemplation, prayer, and study?

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