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God's Call and Its Challenges

Lawrence E. Frizzell, *Seton Hall University*



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God's Call and Its Challenges

**Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell
Institute of Judaeo-Christian Studies
Seton Hall University
South Orange, NJ**

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Third Sunday of Lent

March 3, 2013 Sunday Readings:

Ex 3:1-8, 13-15; Ps 103:1-11; 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12; Lk 13:1-9

GOD'S CALL AND ITS CHALLENGES

Lawrence E. Frizzell

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee! (Francis Thompson)

Like the English poet, who knew the sufferings of an alienated humanity, the Church in her worship celebrates the "world" that is the mystery of God. Utterly beyond our human capacity to attain should we rely on our own efforts, we experience the divine because God seeks us and teaches us. "All things betray thee, who betrayest Me!"

The condescension of "The Hound of Heaven" by the same poet in pursuing weak human beings is portrayed marvelously in the call of Moses. What better way could there be to experience God's simplicity? Moses is drawn by a strange phenomenon, a burning bush, and then hears the divine Word addressing him by name. More attuned to the divine order than the other senses, our hearing grants us an awareness of the suspense of being time-bound. Perhaps we "perceive" reality instantaneously by sight, but how often we are deceived! On the other hand, listening requires a span of attention for understanding. Moses learned first to revere the sacred nature of his encounter. God sanctifies whatever is touched by his presence, so the very ground is holy.

The privilege of knowing God is never limited to the individual but provides the basis for a mission. "I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt" (Ex 3:10). No one feels adequately equipped for collaborating with God. In fact, the acknowledgement of human weaknesses becomes the opening through which the divine glory shines. The key to success is not human prowess or wisdom but the assurance that "God is with you" (Ex 3:12).

The name manifests the person, so Hebrew culture attached great importance to knowledge of God's name. "The God of your ancestors" (3:13) harks back to the initial identification that Moses has been called by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (3:6). The new name revealed to Moses is derived from the verb "to be", emphasizing that *God is present* to sustain his people. The statement "I am who am" became the basis for the specially sacred name YHWH. In the Jewish tradition and in the New Testament circumlocutions such as "Lord" substituted for this Name. Awe for this and other divine names should permeate the Christian tradition as well. Casual use of divine titles shows insensitivity to the divine presence in our midst.

The tendency to speculate that those who suffer premature death must be sinners is criticized by Jesus (Lk 13:1-5). We are all in need of repentance for our sins and are called to turn to God. The two examples cited by Jesus involve human violence or negligence. How many times people blame God when the free will of others should bear responsibility! In many situations it seems better not to place blame on a family member or neighbor, so we lash out at God. The Lord knows that people perhaps could not face a brutally honest evaluation of a given situation. So we formulate our anguish in a "prayer of protest". A calmer, more objective view of the problem should lead to repentance and forgiveness. The marvelous patience of God with his creatures is described by a parable. Just as a gardener does not give up easily, so Jesus wants us to realize God's mercy towards those who do not yet produce fruit. However, this should not lead to nonchalance! We look to past history, especially in the Scriptures, for patterns that help us to make sense out of life. "These things happened to them as an example, and they have been written down as a warning to us..." (1 Cor 10:11).