

Third Sunday of Lent
March 7, 2010
Father Dick Rossman
Luke 13:1-9

When you are meeting someone for the first time there is a need to start a conversation. Since we know nothing about them we need to have some basic information. If we are not able to learn about them we will only be able to look at them and smile. Smiling often happens because we do not speak their language. What are the common questions you ask them and what questions do they ask you? We often like to know where they live, what they do to make a living, what interests they enjoy, and anything else that will tell us how to talk with them. We are looking to gather some data so we can begin to understand where they fit into our view of life. We have the idea that if we have enough information we will be able to assign them into a proper classification.

In our first reading, Moses has a wonderful God experience. He is told to take off his sandals because where he is standing is holy ground. He knows he is in the presence of the holy because the bush is not being consumed, but continues to burn. Moses is told that God has heard the cries of his people in slavery and is going to save them and Moses is going to be his messenger. Moses is told that this God is the same God who has been involved with the three Patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So this is the same God who has been with them through the years. Moses receives this information but if he is to convince his people that he has been sent by God then he wants to say who has sent him. The name God gives is "I am who am". It sounds as if God is playing with Moses. In one way this tells us nothing and in another way it tells us everything about God. It is as if God were playing a joke on Moses by asking him to guess what his name is. God was answering the question in the best way possible. God is not the God of yesterday who has done great things in the past. Nor is this God the God of tomorrow who will only do things once we complete our part of the treaty. God is present at this very moment. God just is. There is really no way to capture God. We say God is powerful, God is all knowing, God is eternal, God is everywhere, but those are Not really names for God. No matter how hard we try we are never able to name God. And if we name God one of these eternal God names we certainly do not have a personal name for God. The closest personal name we have for God is Father but even that name is not the best name for God. We say God forgives, creates, judges and loves but God does not do anything. We might be able to say that those things

happen because God just is. God is not heavy or light, tall or short, here or there. God would say, "Do not take my qualities or nicknames and think that you have captured me". Any name we give to this mystery is an idol and all of our naming seems to just eliminate possibilities rather than give us the reality of God.

What Moses is told is that this God is the same God the ancestors accepted. This certainly is not naming God but it does place God within a relationship. So it is not important what we name God but it is important how we live with this God. So it is the conversations we have in our prayer where we experience the presence of God. In a way God forces us away from naming and controlling in our minds and moves us into the mystery that God loves us. Living in this mystery we worry less about being able to name the one who loves us.

After we have spent considerable time with a person, we move from needing to have information about them to just wanting to spend time with them. So when we come together there is the need to share rather than sort out who they are. At that point we are much more willing to allow the relationship to ebb and flow wherever it might go without much effort on our part to control what is taking place.

Think of the names you have for those you love. My niece's son called my dad "Great" which I guess is a short form of Great grandpa. Those names may not make sense to others and even if you explain how the name came about it is difficult to help the other person appreciate why this name of love has so much meaning for you. I do not have a personal name for God. I say something like, "I'm back" or I do not say anything and just start talking with this one who is so important to me. It certainly would be good to have your own name for God when you pray. It would help you to move into prayer intimacy each time with much less effort and startup time. But the real issue is not what we name God but that we spend time actually praying rather than simply talking about God.