

Questioning God

On Sunday morning, I was vesting for the 10:30 a.m. Mass, when she showed up in the back of church. She began to tell me about some of her family troubles, especially about a nephew who was depressed and was thinking of committing suicide. The family was distraught and wondered where they went wrong as they wondered why the nephew was so depressed.

“Is there any scripture passage I could read that might help us in this situation and give us some answer to what we’re going through?” In the rush of the moment, I could not think about any passage that might answer her question. Instead I told her to pray about it at Mass. I told her to tell God what was going on within her heart.

She said “I’ve been praying about it and don’t seem to get an answer. I know you are not supposed to question God but I have so many unanswered questions and I wonder why all this is happening to our family.”

I suggested that she pray what was in her heart to God; to tell him her thoughts, feelings, questions; to have a heart to heart conversation with God. “I though we were not supposed to question God,” she retorted.

I assured her that it was okay to question God. I told her that unless we are willing to ask questions, how can we understand anything. We ask questions in order to understand. Questioning does not always show a lack of faith; rather, it becomes an effort to move to a greater depth of faith.

She seemed satisfied, left and sat down near the back of the church. I pulled on the chasuble and signaled to the cantor to begin the opening song. As the Mass began, I wondered about that woman bringing her own cross and question to lay them on the altar of sacrifice. I also wondered about the time when Jesus was in agony and how he asked the Father his own question: “My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?” Some time later, he was able to give it all over to the Father when he was able to say, “Into your hands, I commend my spirit.”

Someone once remarked that two kinds of people who please God: those who serve God with all their heart because they know God, and those who seek God with all their heart because they do not know God. Christians of all kinds are both finders and seekers. We are finders of God in that we are drawn into a sense of wonder and awe before the living Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being and we are all seekers who need to confess our foibles and failures, people who hunger for a deeper intimacy with the Holy One, people who wrestle with all kinds of questions and doubts.

Questioning and doubts may be the key to one's faith development. People's attitude toward faith and its development has been changing. There are various reasons for it.

First of all, Lifestyle changes impact our questioning. People are constantly on the move: corporate promotions, new job opportunities; increase in divorce, changing Sunday practices of religion; multiplicity of shopping malls, athletic events; other options for time, money and activities.

Knowledge explosion is another factor. New knowledge in geology, astronomy, archeology force us to rethink our traditional biblical images; new understandings in psychology and sociology help us to understand people more; more opportunities for higher education, continuing education, "lifelong learning"; movement of learning from "teacher-orientated" to "learner-orientated". Faced with such options, it is easy to see a role for some doubt and questioning.

We often frown on the agnostic; yet an agnostic is not an atheist, who denies a belief in God, but rather one who has questions, who wants to get more information before making decisions of faith.

Regarding our questioning, first of all, we must honor our questions and listen to them. Doubts can be a sign that we are moving from the stage of passive receiving our faith to appropriating our faith and making it our own. Doubt may signal the birth pangs of a mature faith.

Secondly, Doubts are part of who we are, and if we want to draw closer to God, we must be willing to share our doubts with him. Doubt is a form of spiritual pain which we can share openly and honestly with God. When we share our doubts, we open ourselves to discovering the feelings that lie beneath the doubts and then those feelings become our prayer..

Finally, we must be ready to move past our questioning and doubts because we have finally “come and saw” the hand of God at work.