

A reflection for the fifth week of Lent

Recognizing Ourselves

The moment we recognize our inadequacy, our sin, our smallness before the greatness of the transcendent God, we are capable of truly being called out of ourselves. When God is heard to say, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds, “Here am I; send me!” He is empowered, not paralyzed.

Similarly, Christ’s manifestation of transcendent power was not for the sake of stirring human anxiety and fear. Christ wants to call us to a life mission far beyond the expectations of our constricted categories.

Human encounter with the transcendent God has always met with resistance. But the idea of a God wholly independent of our sway is especially repulsive to contemporary taste. After all, it requires a terrible admission of our insufficiency. It demands a recognition that we cannot rescue or save ourselves. It commands a yielding to, a humble listening for, an obeying of an other that is utterly beyond our mere human minds and wills.

The gospel Paul preached rests upon the recognition that we mere humans stand in need of salvation and that we are powerless to do this for ourselves. What is more, we are sinners who need to be healed of our moral wounds. This, we believe in faith, has been done in Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and promises us a world beyond our earth and our earthly projects. It is not by dint of human science, alchemy, or artifact that our meaning can be found. It is only by God’s kind favor that we are what we are and that we are made for something far greater still.