



# Shepherd's Voice

24 March 2019, 9.15 a.m. | 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent Year C

Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15 | Psalm 103:1-2, 3-4, 6-7, 8, 11 | 1  
Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12 | Luke 13:1-9

## HERE I AM

### *Introduction*

Dear sisters and brothers, as we come together for this Sunday Eucharist with the parish community, we have with us five people who have intended to be baptised in the Catholic faith, and on Easter Sunday morning, these people will be baptised in this church. They have to go through a process called the RCIA – the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. The five of them, as adults, have made a choice for the faith.

Most of us have faith by convention because we were baptised as children, but these five have gone through a long process, which will culminate at the Easter morning Mass with their baptism. Let us pray for them, that as they continue on this journey, they may truly prepare themselves in their hearts and minds to welcome God in the Catholic faith.

---

### *Homily*

My dear sisters and brothers, a few years ago, I came across a very interesting book titled 'The God I Don't Believe In', written by a Spanish author, Juan Arias. In the book, he quotes Cardinal Maximus IV, Patriarch of the East, saying, 'The God that many atheists don't believe in is the God I don't believe in'.

Very often, what atheists and people who are non-believers reject is a certain image of God, which may be distorted and not according to the scriptures. I remember reading about the life of the famous atheistic French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. He narrated an incident in his home that took place when he was a child. When his parents saw him up to mischief, they told Jean-Paul, 'Look, there is God. He is looking at you. He will punish you'. Jean-Paul says that from that time onwards, he made up his mind to fight against that God – in other words, to reject that image of God. So, he was rejecting a distorted image of God that was given to him in his childhood. God became like a stick which his parents wanted to use in order to correct his behaviour. Jean-Paul Sartre felt that if this is our God, he would reject him.

All of us need to examine our own understanding of God. Last week, we had a very beautiful recollection in our church for the EMHC, ushers and lectors. Fr Melroy Fernandes led the group through a reflection on their understanding of God. Each one of us needs to do this. For instance, when we pray in the church, what is the image of God that comes to our minds?

Today's First Reading, taken from the book of Exodus, describes for us this very beautiful and graphic incident, when Moses encounters God in a burning bush. As we study this scripture, we get certain clues that will help us examine our own understanding and image of God.

Moses was busy with his daily routine. He was a shepherd, looking after the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro. Suddenly, as he was doing this, he saw a burning bush – a bush that was aflame. I remember when I went on a tour of the Holy Land, I was accompanied by a French archaeologist, and we did not visit the popular tourist spots. As we went through the desert, we came across a bush, and this lady pointed to it and said, 'You notice that bush has little pods'. In fact, I have one of the pods which I preserved from that plant. At a certain time of the year, the pods fill up with a highly inflammable gas. When there are strong winds, these bushes catch fire because of the sparks created by the branches rubbing against each other, releasing the gas from the pods. Now, this archaeologist asked me a question: Could Moses have seen such an ordinary phenomenon, but because he was a person of faith, he saw God in that burning bush? The burning bush could have been divine intervention, but it could also have been a natural happening, which Moses looked at with the eyes of faith.

The reading says that Moses stopped when he saw the burning bush. In order to encounter God, we also need to stop. Our lives are so busy: we are rushing from one task to the other, from one thought to another. We have various situations to attend to, deadlines to meet, etc. Moses stopped. He was engaged in his normal everyday tasks, and being engaged in his daily work, he encounters God when he stops.

The reading says that a voice from the bush spoke to him and said, 'Moses, take off your sandals'. This is another element that we need to consider in order to encounter God. Our sandals, our shoes, are sometimes our own security. When we take off our sandals, we empty ourselves, we abandon our security, and we enter into the presence of God. Very often, we also have our own perceptions, and often, our own misconceptions about God. That is why God tells Moses, 'Take off your sandals'. How many of us are ready to discard our set ideas and securities, so that we can sit in front of God with our weaknesses, with our nothingness, and allow God to speak to us?

Moses answers, 'Here I am'. Many of us can spend a beautiful time in prayer with just these three words:

**Here** – to be in the here and now. Many of us are physically present in the church just now, but our minds could be at home, wondering what to cook for lunch, or at the office, thinking about our next task. We need to be fully present in the presence of God.

**I** – to be present just the way we are. The preacher for our Lenten retreat next week, Lalith Perera, has often said, 'Come to God as you are'. Don't think that we need to perfect ourselves in order to come to God. We come to God in our weakness, in our sinfulness, and we say, 'God, here I am'. I, as I am today. God accepts the 'I' of our today.

**Am** – the present tense, to **be**. Don't live in the past or with anxiety for the future. Let us be in the presence of God in the current moment.

God also reveals himself as 'I am who I am'. No names or titles. God is present for us if we are ready to be present for him. Let us pray that like Moses, all of us may learn to encounter God.

There's a beautiful verse written by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the wife of Robert Browning:

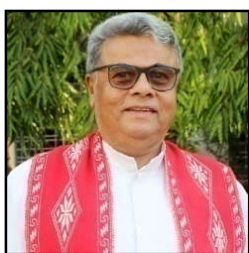
*Earth's crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries.*

Let us pray that we will be able to encounter God, like Moses, in the ordinary things of life, and that we say to God, 'Here I am'. And God says, 'I am for you who I am'. Amen.

---

### *The Lord's Prayer*

Let us pray with complete trust and confidence in a God who saves us, who heals us from our sinfulness, who lifts us up, who does not condemn, but pardons us. We pray, Our Father...



Fr Cleophas Fernandes  
*Parish Priest, St. Pius X Church*