

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

So, how are we to explain, how are we to deal, with a God who is nearly impossible to find? How are we to come to terms with a God who often seems random and perhaps even capricious? We pray for a job, we get the job, and rightly we give thanks. But perhaps we are haunted by the nagging thought that we got the job since our employer needed help and we had the proper qualifications. Deeper still are those little shards of thought, often confirmed as we learn more about our neighbors, that someone else was also praying for that same position. We learn he had more mouths to feed and that his station in life was more precarious than ours—but we got the job.

Often in desperation, and maybe in an attempt to stave off the void of loneliness, we project God into almost every situation of our lives. The plate fell and didn't break. The car stopped just in time. My child slipped but didn't fall into the water. That's not to say He isn't in or is not aware of these things. But where and how and why? These are the questions that nag us and cause some to stumble. Why didn't I get the job? Why did my child get sick? Why do the wicked get away with everything? Why do You let them mock us and You, O Lord?

If you're like me, just about every good thing (at least from my perspective) that has happened to me—and there have been many—can be countered by just as many bad things (again, from my perspective). Perhaps, if I were to take a step back and try to gain a larger point-of-view, I would find that, on a larger scale, some of the good things that happened to me had a not-so-good effect on my neighbor. I suppose I could do that *ad nauseam*. The result? A foggier view, and no closer to an answer. And, so, the result's what's often a stumbling block for us and for those outside the Church: God is hidden.

This is not to say that our God doesn't, on occasion, manifest Himself, His glory, and power. However, these manifestations are so rare that we label them uniquely as miracles. Miracles *are* rare, which is why they are precisely labeled as miracles. Apart from that uniquely historical event of the incarnation and God walking among us in the person of Christ, miracles are extremely rare. Read the Old Testament and you will note long gaps between recorded miraculous events. In fact, much of the Old and New Testament remains rather mundane. People live and die. They sin and suffer the consequences. History is played out. Most of us know that in the Book of Ester God's name is never mentioned, yet He is most certainly at work. He is hidden, most notably, behind the activities of Ester and her cousin Mordecai. The same holds true for you.

For you, it begins where it must: in the Lord's Church. When you were Baptized these words were spoken:

*And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).*

Hidden in the water and in the Word was Christ Himself. It was a typical day. The weather was typical, no lightning bolts, or voices from heaven marked the occasion. Words, water, and a

middle-aged man were the only things visible—hardly the stuff of legend. Yet, as He Himself says, Christ was there, and you were made a disciple. You were called from darkness into His marvelous light and from that point forward sealed with the Holy Spirit as an heir to the Kingdom of Heaven. Then your life, with all its ups and downs, went on. You’ve been hurt and hurt others. You’ve sinned against God and your neighbor—sometimes greatly. Others have sinned against you embittering your heart and causing you to question exactly where was this Christ when you needed Him? Yet He was there, as He told you. He is there, still, and always.

You see, there is, at least from our narrow point-of-view, great difficulty and frequent consternation in looking for God at work. Yet at work He is. He has, in His great mercy, told us the end of it all—which is wonderful for us. For now, though, He is often hidden. In this hiddenness these words of St. Paul find their full freight: *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”* (Romans 8:28). Your call—your Baptism—was according to His purpose, and it was for good. Yes, even little old you He uses for His purpose. Note also that the word “good” is singular. The things we experience are not for each of our individual definitions and perceptions of good. Indeed, what we experience may not seem good for us at all. It is the one good—God’s good—that matters. And this is what He is about. “Thy will be done” we pray. Rightly so. We know the big picture—the arc of the story. Yet beneath the arc, where we live and die, it often seems a muddled mess.

As we gather week after week, in this muddled mess, we are reminded of the big picture, and, no matter what, to keep that in our hearts and minds. It is then, alongside the saints who came before we begin to be content. It is then we echo the words of St. Paul: *“For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong”* (2 Corinthians 12:10). The word “content” here means to “regard as good.” For the sake of Christ, when things happen, good or bad, we regard them as good, for God’s good will is being done. It is His will that matters. So, we finally begin to see goodness in everything, even things we cannot make sense of. For example, Paul was imprisoned. Yet, His imprisonment in Rome brought many in Caesar’s own household to faith (see Philippians). Three-hundred years later, the Roman emperor Constantine (Whose mother, Helena, was a devout Christian), would himself become Christian and grant Christianity legal status in the empire. For a moment, we glimpse God’s good will at work—for a moment.

My brothers and sisters do not despair when you cannot make sense of things—especially the things of God. It is meant to be this way and it is good that this is so. Know, for God has revealed it to you, that His good is indeed being done. And remember who you are in Christ. It is only this good news that gets us through. But get through we will by His good grace and favor. We indeed know the end of the story, and the end is very, very good.

In Christ’s most holy name,

Pastor Astrowski

Postscript: We will take up one facet of this issue starting Wednesday Evening's in September as we discuss Christian Prayer. Details will be in the Church Bulletin.