

Dear People Whom God Loves,

December 3, 2011

Awesome Love

All of our images of God limp. There is no way that we can fully or I would say nearly fully describe God. The best of our doctrines and images point to what God is. That is valuable and necessary but God is always much more and beyond the best of our doctrines and image.

That being said, the image of God is essential if we are to think about and relate to God. Some images do a better job than others. I suggest the image of awesome Love, that is helpful to me, can be valuable to others. I find that the two words together are more insightful than either word alone.

In the past the image of God was awesome. That image pointed to God as the Supreme Being. He-and we always used the word he-was all powerful, all knowing, the judge of all our actions and even our thoughts. He demanded strict obedience. If we followed his rules strictly, he would reward us. If we disobeyed, he would punish us. That would end with enjoying the bliss of heaven or the torments of hell. That state would last forever.

I admit that this is a caricature, but I believe it will resonate with many of us, especially those of us who are older.

With this image, God was indeed awesome. That is the plus. The minus is that it easily led to our relationship with God as one of fear based obedience. It also meant that the prime virtue is obedience. In Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, the older son (not the prodigal) resembles this kind of spirituality. He was obedient but also self-righteous and devoid of compassion.

This is the God with a frown. I suggest that we keep the awesome and at the same time let go of the fear based relationship with God. This can be done.

Before we get into how love can be awesome, I want to mention how love can be misunderstood. Love is gentle but it always has a toughness to it that seeks what is good for another when things are difficult in a relationship.

Gentle and tough. Here is an example of one without the other and of the two together. A little child is having a wonderful time playing with a butcher knife. Gentle only. Mom or dad react like this: My dear little child is having so much fun I don't want to stop her. Tough only. Mom or dad react like this: Grab the knife away from the child and say harshly-don't you ever touch that knife again or I am going to beat you. Gentle and tough. Mom or dad reacts like this: Gently takes the knife from the child and says-this knife is very sharp and you could hurt yourself. I am very serious about this. I love you and I don't want you to be hurt. Takes the crying child into her/his arms and says I love you and you are a good boy/girl. Here is one of your toys. Let's play with that.

Perhaps Jesus was thinking of this kind of love when he told us to be wise as serpents and gentle as doves.

This homey example of good parental love can deepen our insight into the image of God as awesome love. Just as loving parents make boundaries for their children and allow freedom within those boundaries, so does God who is Love make boundaries and allows freedom for the universe, our world and us humans.

We are now in a position to see how we can preserve the awesome of some previous ideas of God and at the same time remove the fear. This is the fear that prevents us from experiencing the closeness of God.

The scriptures tell us that God is Love. Not just that God loves us, but that to be God is to be Love—indeed infinite Love.

Love (God) is not a supreme being. God is not a being. God is deeper than a being. God is the spirit/love that is not a being but the source of being. Love is the source of the original being, the tiny speck which exploded (the big bang) about 13.5 billion years ago. That explosion that finally resulted in the stars; the innumerable galaxies in our universe. That explosion would not have resulted in the galaxies if the expansion rate that allowed this had not been infinitesimally precise.

The explosion of stars produced the carbon that makes life possible. One of the stars is the sun. The energy of the sun allowed life to grow upon our earth, until we humans appeared. Through the guiding love that worked through evolution. Love continues to permeate the universe and all of us. Our tradition speaks of that presence in us humans as the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

The book of Genesis speaks of the awesomeness using the understanding of the world in ancient times. The story of the universe we have today is even more awesome. We tremble in the face of that mysterious Love. As William J. O'Malley says "wow".

The awesomeness increases. This incredible infinite mysterious Love, loves me. "Wow." That Love also loves every human being and every bit of creation. Awesome Love can lead us into or even throw us into a new vision of life and everything.

I would like to close with an image; we kneel and bow in awe of Love. Love opens her arms and tells us to stand. Love says I want to hold you and I want you to hug me back.

From my perspective this is what spirituality and religion is all about. It is the big love story. Our wonderful and little love stories draw their inspiration and power from it.

Smile, God loves you,

Father Clay

P.S. The inspiration for these thoughts came from the book! *The Wow Factor* by William J. O'Malley S. J.