

## **Homily:**

The Bible often talks about God as if He had human body parts. His eyes behold the nations. His ears are open to prayers. He tramples nations under His feet. He stretches out His hand. His strong right arm delivers His people.

Everyone knows that these anthro-po-morph-isms cannot be taken literally. They are symbolic and poetic ways of speaking and helping us relate to God. Except in the person of Jesus, God does not have human body parts. But if we were to give up these anthro-po-morphic expressions, we would have a hard time talking about God.

The same is true of the emotions that are often ascribed to God – His anger, His jealousy, His delight, His compassion. God does not have emotions and once again it is a way for us, as humans, to understand.

So when we come across the expression in this morning's lesson that God repented of creating humans, we have to be discerning. Repentance for us means being sorry, having regrets about something we have done, asking forgiveness, and trying to avoid doing the same thing again.

But for God repentance simply means going in a different direction. In this morning's lesson it means starting over without any of the emotional overtones that the word has for us. God does not regret anything He has done. He does not feel guilty, and He does not seek forgiveness. He simply decides to start over.

The Hebrew word for "man" in the generic sense, is "*adam*". But God is not going to start over by creating Adam all over again. He is going to go in a different direction. This time He is going to work with a man He considers to be the best of the human race.

He goes back to the beginning when the earth was a watery chaos and He separated the waters above from the waters below and gathered the waters below into restricted areas so that dry land could emerge. That's

what happens in the story of the great flood. God begins a new creation, and the first thing He does is destroy the old one. But He preserves a remnant – one man and his family and a mating pair of every animal.

Destroying the old to make room for the new is a theme that recurs again with the story of the defeat and exile of Israel and the destruction of the temple. God sent His chosen people into exile from the promised land into which He had once led them, but again He preserved a faithful remnant from which to begin anew.

God never gives up. He destroys the old so that the new can emerge.

The same theme is taken up in the New Testament. St. Paul says, “That which is sown is not quickened except it die.” Jesus says, “except a man be born again he cannot enter the kingdom of God.” St. John the Divine says in his vision, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.”

Always the goal is the same. God intends to restore the great Sabbath, the day on which He rested because the creation was perfect, and He is willing to clear the way for the perfect by destroying the imperfect.

The great Sabbath is foreshadowed in the flood story in at least two ways. First, there is the name “Noah” which means “rest.” Second there is the great peace when all the animals live together in harmony, as Isaiah also foretold in his great vision of the wolf dwelling with the lamb and the calf lying down with the lion, and the carnivores eating straw instead of preying on other animals. St. Paul reflects that vision when he talks about the whole creation waiting and crying out for that day to come.

And come it will, but not until God has repented and started over again and again.

In the original creation, God started with Adam, the man of dust. In the flood, he started over with Noah, a man of righteousness. When that

didn't achieve what He wanted, God took a different direction with the calling out of Abraham, a man of faith, whose obedience was tested and proven. From Abraham, God created a great nation to advance the cause of the great Sabbath.

Each time God took a different direction there was progress, but each time there was rebellion and disobedience. Finally, God sent His Son to assume human nature and bring about the fulfillment of the Great Sabbath, which Jesus called "the kingdom of God."

That vision has still not been fulfilled even in our day, but definitive progress has been made. Jesus has conquered death and has become for us an ark in which we can survive the final judgment of God.

Make no mistake or exist under false pretense. The flood is the judgment of God on the human race, just as the exile and the destruction of the temple is the judgment of God on the Jews. But the wood of the cross is the wood of the ark in which all who take shelter are saved from ultimate destruction and carried in safety to the new heaven and the new earth, the land of peace and rest.

God can be seen throughout the Bible as the God of new beginnings. He is willing to start over again and again. He is willing to start over with you. Whatever you may have done in the past, whatever direction you have taken in your life, God is willing for you to be born again, to start over, to repent and to go in a different direction.

Jesus says in the New Testament Lesson for today that the great flood caught everyone by surprise because they were so pre-occupied with the affairs of the world that they failed to read the signs of the times. Caught up in their own selfish thoughts they did not even notice the ark that had been built or to wonder about it. Don't let that happen to you. Be aware of yourself, your surroundings, your behavior and your faith.

Don't get so attached to family, friends, possessions or career that you lose sight of the ultimate end of all things, including your own life.

Don't just cling to your old ways and your old loyalties. Another great judgment is coming to destroy the world as we know it and open the way for the Kingdom of God. Seek refuge in the ark, the cross of Christ. Ask God to destroy all that is imperfect in you and make you over into a new person, fit for the Great Sabbath.

In my diaconate studies, I read a book by Richard Rohr entitled "Called, Formed, Sent." In this book he discusses how God chooses not to raise us up but to encourage a transformative journey. To transform means to surrender and let go of our ego and all that draws us away from God. All failure, suffering, disappointment, defeat and humiliation are in fact the greatest of all teachers. As I move toward serving God and the church, I move toward transformation and that requires that I change. It is about me destroying the old ways in my life and accepting the new ones. As Rohr mentions many times in this book, "Don't pray to Jesus, pray through Jesus."

God repents and begins again. So should we all.

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