

**PENTECOST SUNDAY:**

**May 19, 2024**

A few years ago, in BP times (before pandemic), a novel appeared called "The Shack". It was made into a movie and I can't recall the actors involved. I don't think the movie made much of a splash. It was probably too pious, too religious, for general tastes. I think the story, the movie as well, were helpful, however, for believers to repicture how they imaged God. Maybe a bit of a shakeup for some, maybe even blasphemy in some peoples' eyes.

The story, too complicated to fully detail, has the protagonist, a middle-aged man searching in the woods for his young daughter who has disappeared. There he comes upon an old shack. He enters and finds a lovely home inside. But it is the people that are interesting. They are the Three-in-One God. At the stove cooking is this large black woman. This is God the Father. Later in the film this God appears as a wizened old man in the form of an indigenous, weather-beaten Indian Chief. What do you think so far?

Then there is Jesus, a young man who is a carpenter working in the garage. Very talented. He is not a blue-eyed, blond European but a middle-eastern man. Finally there is the Holy Spirit in the form of a wispy Asian young woman who seems to flit around the scene. The three are there to heal the angry, revengeful father from his own wrath.

Are you shocked or bored? I thought this was very profound and helpful for all of us who have believed. It raises an important reflection for those who no longer believe as simply as they once did. When some people come to this place, they flee, or they try to recapture the simplicity of their youth. But the challenge is to let go of the simplistic images we once had.

What is your image of God the Father? Michelangelo and other painters have given us an ancient old white man to portray depth, wisdom, omnipotence. But as we grow, we must confront the case where God is not a human. God is an infinite abyss of love and cannot be portrayed. A cosmic ocean might be a better image. But there is no image. On the other hand, Jesus calls him Father and tells us we are loved, chosen, called by name. This infinite abyss of love wants a personal relationship with us. We may simply have to let go of our images and trust this beautiful, loving God.

We haven't done much better with picturing Jesus. Again we have no experience of a human being who is God. The sad Fact is that many have ignored his humanity and stressed him as Son of God. Some go to Mass to adore Christ, to honor him as God. But in so doing we ignore his teachings, the sermon on the mount, his teaching us as our brother what humanity, our humanity, is all about. The movie shows Jesus as this young, strong, tradesman.

Then we come to the Holy Spirit. What kind of images do we have of the Spirit? A bird, a flame of fire, a blast of wind. My own belief is that the Holy Spirit is easily recognizable in our lives if we pay attention. No great natural forces but subtle movements within our hearts

There is a desire, a force within us that always wants more. We want to be loved but also fear it. We have been made to be one with God and all beings. And our hearts are restless until they rest in God. We seek love to an insatiable degree and can never be satisfied. So the Holy Spirit stirs within us groaning with endless longing for completion. The Holy Spirit is speaking to our Spirit. Saint Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, generosity, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. It is easy to mistake this longing for the need for more material things. We continue to want more. We can ignore the Spirit's entry because it is frequent and therefore gentle.

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