

Mystery

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I have always been a fan of the show “Star Trek: The Next Generation.” Part of the allure of the show is the dilemma’s that Picard and the crew of the Enterprise get into. There’s always some mystery that needs to be solved. In one episode, Data, the android on board, becomes enamored with mysteries, having read all of the Sherlock Holmes novels. In fact, he programs the holodeck to create a Sherlock Holmes villain capable of defeating himself and removes the safety protocols to make that happen. It causes a huge problem for the crew, but eventually Data prevails. He even uses Holmes’ catchphrase, “Elementary my dear Watson.”

Paul refers to another mystery in his letter to the Ephesians. We have heard Fr. Ward say this before, but whenever the Bible uses the word ‘mystery’ it refers to something hidden that God has revealed. It does not mean a Sherlock Holmes-ish mystery that requires us to walk around with a pipe in our mouth and a magnifying glass looking for clues. Daniel makes this clear to King Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel 2:28 states, “However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in the latter days.” God reveals mysteries, and in the case of the King the mystery has to do with the latter days. In the case of our second lesson from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 3 it means the Gospel, God’s plan of salvation.

Remember from Matthew 16:13-20 that Jesus questioned His disciples as to who people say that He is. And then He asks them who they say that He is. Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And in verse 17 “Jesus said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’” God reveals the mystery to us.

In Ephesians 3:1-3 Paul states, “For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that be revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief.” Paul did not need to figure anything out on his own. It was revealed to him by God. Paul writes on this in his letter to the Galatians also. In 1:15-18 he states,

But when God, who had set me apart even from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus. Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days.

God revealed the mystery. The Gospel is not man-made. It is not the result of anything that man could do to remedy the fall. It is the result of God’s great love for all mankind. It is His plan, not ours.

Ephesians 3:4, "By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit." Skipping to verse 9 Paul states that part of his mission is "to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things." God revealed the mystery of Christ in full when the time was right. Prior to the time of Christ, God revealed His plan to the prophets. We can see Christ throughout the Old Testament. As St. Augustine stated, "In the Old Testament the New is concealed. In the New the Old is revealed." That is what Augustine believed and taught; and that is what we believe and teach here. All of the Scriptures are given to us by God to point us to Christ. All of them!

When Paul tells Timothy that "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work," (2 Timothy 3:16-17) Paul is referring to the Old Testament. When Jesus explains about Himself on the road to Emmaus, we are told in Luke 24:27 that, "beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures," that is the Old Testament. Christ is in the Old Testament, and of course also in the New Testament.

You know it is aggravating when people suggest that God is different in the Old Testament than He is in the New Testament! Christ is in both, and Hebrews 13:8 states that, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." And these people say things like, "In the Old Testament, God is always judging and destroying. But He is loving in the New Testament." To that I say that He is loving in both. His judgements in the Old Testament were His warning for the people to repent of their evil ways because the consequence of their evil ways was death. Isn't that what Paul wrote to the Romans? "The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus the Lord." (Romans 6:23).

Consider the Egyptians. The plagues that God brought on the land of Egypt was His warning for them to repent. God gave them opportunity to repent. God is full of compassion and mercy. "The LORD is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. ⁹The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works." (Psalm 145:8-9).

God wants all to repent and turn to Him. That is part of the mystery that has been revealed. God's plan of salvation was not just for the Jews but also for the Gentiles. Paul continues in verses 6-7, "to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power."

In Romans 11 Paul uses the imagery of an olive tree to describe the position of the Gentile believers. "If the first piece of dough is holy, the lump is also; and if the root is holy, the branches are too. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root of the olive tree." (Romans 11:16-17). The Gentile believers being from the wild olive having been grafted into the covenant community by faith in Christ; remembering that the root supports them, as Paul

states in verse 18. And the root represents the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from whom descended all of Israel. And God made a covenant with Abraham which involved the promise that through Abraham all the nations of the world would be blessed. Which was fulfilled in Christ's first coming when he bore our sins and took them to the cross that we all might be saved.

That is our position as Gentile disciples of Christ. Fed by the root which gets its nourishment from God. And so, as Paul makes clear in Galatians 2 Gentiles do not need to become Jews and observe Jewish customs in order to be grafted into the tree. All that is needed is faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. What a promise. What a mystery that God has revealed to us in His Son our Lord Jesus Christ!

That is the mystery, and it really is elementary my dear brothers and sisters. It is basic to the faith. And it comes with two obligations on our part. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 4:1, "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." The first obligation is to accept Christ into our hearts. Not just intellectually, but in a way that changes who we are so that we live not for ourselves but for Him. We accept His offer of salvation available to us because of Christ and we put our trust in Him and follow Him as our Lord. The second obligation is to be good stewards of the mysteries that He has revealed to us.

Paul sets the example for us. Continuing with Ephesians 3:8-10,

To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places.

How do we be good stewards of the mysteries? We tell people. That might seem difficult sometimes, but with the responsibility to spread the gospel comes from God the grace to carry out the mission. We should not want these truths to remain hidden from people. God revealed them to us so that we would accept them and then tell others because God loves them and therefore, we should love them too.

God's love for us all was expressed on the cross by Christ and our love for those around us is expressed through sharing the gospel. And when we do that, Paul says, we are announcing to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places that we are children of the Most High God and that He is good, He is great, and He loves us so much that God the Son, Jesus Christ, died on the cross for us, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, is seated at the right hand of the Father, and that He is coming back. We are in a spiritual battle. We must announce which side we are on. And when we accept Christ and act as good stewards of the mysteries of God, we announce that we are on the side of the Living God.

With that announcement comes some pushback from the enemy. Satan does not like to be reminded that he is defeated. He hates all mankind and wants to trick us all to take his side instead. And he does this in a number of ways. He will spread lies about us. He will try to get

us to believe lies. He will try to harass us. He will trick others into persecuting us. He will do whatever he can to try and get us to give up on God and prevent us from spreading the gospel.

Look at all the things that happened to Paul. He was stoned and left for dead at Ephesus. He was shipwrecked. He was imprisoned. And yet Paul never stopped spreading the gospel. And seeing Paul go through all those trials and tribulations must have caused a reaction in the believers in Ephesus because Paul told them specifically “not to lose heart at” his “tribulations” (Ephesians 3:13) on their behalf because they are for their glory. The Church in Ephesus was important to God. And Satan tried hard to discourage them.

It can be disheartening when we face such trials. But we persevere and pray, as Paul did, that God would grant us,

according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:16-19)

Whenever Satan attacks us, it should encourage us because we know that God is for us. We are loved by God, and He has a plan for us that Satan does not want to come to fruition.

Let us always remember the mystery that God loves us and sent Christ to die for our sins to redeem us. That is so elementary my dear brothers and sisters, and yet there are those who miss out. Let us always remember to accept that truth and live as servants of God and stewards of the mysteries of God and sharing the gospel with others. And may we not lose heart when trials come, remembering that Jesus told us that in this world we will have trouble. But also because we know that greater is He who is in us than He who is in the world because Christ is He who is in us, and He overcame the world.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!