

Well are you confused by this passage? Join the club. Throughout the ages, sermons have been written about today's gospel reading and at major Church councils, the questions around this passage have been addressed and there is really no consensus. It can be quite confusing, or I prefer to say mystifying. I prefer mystifying because of the word mystery. We describe Holy Communion as a divine mystery sometimes and use this phrase here and there when discussing not only sacraments but the ways of God in general. It's quite a helpful way to wrap our minds and hearts around ideas that can be quite beyond us.

In every day usage we use the term mystery to mean something confounding that needs to be solved. The classic is a murder mystery. But in theological terms a divine mystery isn't like a secret waiting to be solved. God doesn't keep secrets. Rather, it is a reality we are invited into that becomes apparent when we have eyes to see. Think for example of people we consider to be mystics. You may be one yourself or know someone who seems to be so connected with the divine that there is something special about them or probably more like weird. This is to say that some of us have a knack for knowing and experiencing God that the rest of us do not. This is one example of the fact that God does not have secrets but we often lack the ability or interest to see God, who is always all around us, and as we read in the gospel of Luke, dwelling within us. Mystics are somehow more tuned in and see the mystery.

Jesus is known as the mystery of God, meaning that in Jesus Christ we see all revealed about God. Pauls' epistles explain this in a number of places but the most direct is Colossians 1:27 which says: *to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.* Which brings us back to our very mysterious passage from John today where Jesus himself tells us he is the mystery of God.

To help see the mystery right before our eyes it will be good to step back and hear echoes of other passages found in what Jesus is saying. We assume the echoes would have been heard very clearly by his audience whom we see challenging him in such a way that shows them to be learned scholars. The book of Proverbs says: *come, eat of my bread; drink of the wine I have mixed*, in reference to gaining wisdom, which is personified as a woman and the greatest gift of God, to be desired more than anything. Amos talks of God sending a famine, not of bread but of the word of God. And Isaiah says: *as rain and snow come down from heaven, making the earth bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth.* So there are plenty of instances in Hebrew scripture which mix the metaphor of wisdom and learning from the word of God, with bread, and wine, and food.

So Jesus is employing familiar ideas to help share a new idea found in him, a new revelation of God. Some can see it and some can't. Sadly, the ones who should know better are the ones so wrapped up in their own knowledge that they seem to have lost the interest in mystery. And Jesus knows it. When Jesus addresses the crowds he feeds, he refers to the ancient Jews as "our ancestors" but it becomes "your ancestors" in verse 48, thus putting distance between Jesus and this crowd. Throughout the passage, verbs of receptivity like seeing, believing, hearing, and learning are used but not to describe the people challenging him. Sadly, their need to know their religion has kept them from experiencing it. They have stopped wondering about God and

replaced divine mystery with human certainty. It seems they forgot who they are as God's chosen people, delivered from Pharaoh and led through the wilderness, always relying on God.

I Kings mentions the wilderness which of course is reminiscent of Exodus just like Elijah's complaining and desire to be left to die is reminiscent of the grumbling in the wilderness before God sends the manna. The wilderness is a common theme in scripture. Why? First, it is a no-place. The wilderness is a spacious, blank page, without agenda or expectation. It can be disorienting and uncomfortable, but it can also be a place of possibility, where the old ways no longer work and the intrusions of the world have not blocked our vision. The wanderer in the wilderness is unburdened and free. We get the sense from Elijah that he's done all he can in service to the Lord and now, unable to see a way forward, a future, he is resigned. We need to be willing to be in such places of not-knowing, where there are no easy answers or quick fixes. Again, while it can be uncomfortable, it can also be freeing. Sitting with our un-knowing can open us up to the holy.

The people Jesus encounters and feeds in the wilderness seem closer to a wilderness people – those willing to say I have done all I can and haven't found the answers so I am open to something new, while the religious leaders who say 'isn't this Joseph's son' and come with all the answers locked and loaded seem to have forgotten the importance of being led by God through the wilderness. This is a key element to having the mysteries of God revealed to us: a willingness to be humble, to wonder, to admit our frailty, to allow ourselves to be hungry and thirsty. You might be familiar with a curriculum for Sunday school called Godly Play. It's based on the Montessori learning model which encourages children to learn through wonder. I am proud of the Episcopal Church that one of our very own clergy developed this approach and I am very happy that at St. Mark's we use Godly Play. From our very early stages we are invited to wonder about God which is the proper, humble approach to the Almighty. It is the way to having God invite us in. It opens doors and opens our eyes to new and wonderful things revealed to us every day – every time we allow ourselves to wonder about God. In this way, the divine mysteries are revealed.

Quite a lot is being said in this gospel reading today and many have wrestled with possible meanings. Not all Christians have had the same conclusions and it makes sense that maybe we don't either. But that's not enough is it? After all we have come to Jesus this morning to be fed. A shrug won't do the trick. Saying it's a divine mystery won't satisfy the soul. So where is the food for our souls today? I think it is in the seeking and the wondering. I think it is in humbly directing our attention to Jesus knowing we do not have all the answers. I think we are fed as we are drawn in by a divine mystery that might not make sense to our minds but certainly speaks to our hearts. I think it is seeing that when our souls are hungry and truly need to be satisfied, the only thing that will really do the trick, is Jesus Christ.