

5th Sunday of Easter

Cycle A

May 22, 2011 4pm

Saint Margaret Parish, Bel Air

He/She Looks Like...

Many of us have had the wonderful experience of seeing a newly-born baby.

One of the very human things that often happens is that family members and friends look closely at the baby's physical features. They try to see who the baby looks like or takes after.

We hear things like: *"He has his father's forehead and hair."* *"She has her mother's eyes."*

"He's got his grandfather's jaw." *"She has her grandmother's complexion."*

What's underneath this is that we like to see characteristics that identify a baby as a member of the family. Or to put it another way, we like to see family members in the physical features of a newborn.

What Does God Look Like?

As Christians, we obviously believe in God and God's existence.

But, like most human beings, we are curious about God's identity, God's characteristics or traits. We wonder: what is God really like?

Over the centuries, our human imagination has produced many images of God. For example, artists have depicted God all the way from the concrete image of a grandfatherly old man to the abstract concept of "The Great Force."

All of these images of God are important because they have consequences. For example, an image of God as vindictive can lead us to be vindictive or harsh or even warlike.

An image of God as judgmental can lead us to feel distant from God or afraid of God or inappropriately guilty. So, how we image God and see God's traits and characteristics is very important.

God Looks like Jesus

In today's gospel, we see the very human and curious Philip.

Philip asks Jesus, *"Show us the Father"* – *"Show us God."* Jesus responds by presenting himself as a mirror of God.

He says, *"He who has seen me has seen the Father."* *"I am in the Father, and the Father is in me."*

The idea is that Jesus is the self-revelation of God. Saint John in his gospel calls Jesus the Word of God – God's self-expression.

All of this leads us to accept and believe in Jesus as the very Son of God.

And so, we believe that if we look at him, we see who God is and what God is like.

In Jesus' very being, in his concerns, in his thoughts, and in his actions, he reflects the mind and heart of God. Similar to our looking at a baby and seeing the parents or grandparents in the baby's features, we can look at Jesus and see his Father, God himself.

Mystery and Knowledge

So, when we hear Jesus saying, "*Let those among you who are without sin cast the first stone,*" we know that God is patient and forgiving. When we see Jesus mingling with tax collectors and other so-called sinners, we know that God is absolutely inclusive and outreaching.

When we hear Jesus talking about the shepherd seeking out the one lost sheep, we know that God values each one of us personally. And when we hear Jesus saying "*Whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, that you do for me,*" we know that God is especially compassionate and empathetic toward anyone in any kind of need.

No question, we believe that God is mystery, that God is beyond our human ability to understand completely. But by looking at Jesus and his characteristics, we can know a great deal about God.

Conclusion

So, read the gospels with an eye on Jesus and in him we can see God.

See Jesus' traits and we see God's traits. Our curiosity to know what God is like – like Philip's in today's gospel – will be satisfied and laid to rest.