



## The Word...

“God did not make death,  
nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.  
For he fashioned all things that they might have being;  
and the creatures of the world are wholesome,  
and there is not a destructive drug among them  
nor any domain of the netherworld on earth, for justice is undying.  
For God formed man to be imperishable;  
the image of his own nature he made him.  
But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,  
and they who belong to his company experience it”  
*(Wis 1:13-15; 2:23-24).*

## Pondering the Word ...

This reading opens the age-old can of worms: “Is God omnipotent? If God is all-powerful and did not make death, then why does death exist? If God made humans ‘imperishable,’ why do we all perish from this life? And who or what is this ‘devil’ and why does it seem to have trumped God’s vision?”

This discussion has long been had in scholarly halls amid ancient texts and in pubs over several bottles of beer. It’s amusing we humans spend so much time and energy trying to figure God out. Contrary to what Wisdom tells us, *we* seem to have made God in *our own* image. Yet, when we have a human experience of God—namely Jesus—we are apt to reject him or turn his gentle, loving ways into prejudice, bias, and even violence.

Augustine tells us “*God is not what you imagine or what you think you understand. If you understand you have failed.*” Aquinas, towards the end of his life said, “*All that I have written seems like straw compared to what has now been revealed to me.*” If we spend all our time with God in our heads, with textbooks and treatises, rites and rituals, dogmas and doctrines, we will surely miss out on the God we can know...the God in whose nature we are made...the God that is Love.

## Living the Word ...

What is your experience of God? Is it dictated by what you learned as a child or what you are taught in church? Some people shy away from getting to know God personally, feeling like the psalmist, “*such knowledge is too wonderful for me, far too lofty for me to reach*” (Ps 139). Yet, unlike the psalmist, they don’t allow themselves to be encircled, captivated by God’s love.

There is a risk in dwelling solely on thoughts and theories about God, but there is also a risk in not allowing ourselves to learn more about God. The goal is not understanding; it is enlightenment, which is intimate and personal. Who is God in *your* life? Just because we cannot understand God does not mean we can’t share a deep love. Consider going on a retreat given by one of the religious orders (I am partial to Ignatian retreats, but Carmelite, Franciscan, and other order retreats are wonderful too!) Many books by the late William Barry, S.J., provide great insights into how God loves us and wants to be loved. Seek out a spiritual guide who can help you. Waiting for God to invite you? Consider this your invitation!

## Personal Reflections and Ideas ...

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**Mon, Jul 1:** "Another of his disciples said to him, "Lord, let me go first and bury my father." But Jesus answered him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Mt 8:18-22). Jesus' response is quite harsh. I imagine some in the crowd are aghast. Scholars suggest the man's words are code for "let me get my inheritance first," and I guess that could be the case, but I think Jesus is trying to get this main point across: Nothing...not riches, not reputation, not family...nothing can stand in the way of following me. **Provision: Awareness.** In the psalm today, God asks us why we are so willing to recite the statutes God has given us, but so unwilling to live by them. For most of us, it is not intentional, but due to a lack of awareness, living on autopilot. Make a point to pay attention to the little things today: when your patience is tested, when it is just easier to ignore the need around you as you hurry from here to there. Ask yourself this evening: How aware was I this day?

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**Tue, Jul 2:** "You alone have I favored, more than all the families of the earth; therefore, I will punish you for all your crimes" (Am 3:1-8; 4:11-12). The Hebrew translation: "Only with you was I intimate of all the clans of the earth." God sounds like a jilted lover. Typical of the prophets, Amos presents a dire picture of Israel's future, but it is not the anthropomorphized God exacting the punishment. That comes in the form of the wages of sin: idolatry and dissipation that eat at the collective conscious of the community. Jesus gives us the same message: "Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more" (Lk 12: 48). **Provision: Accept God's mercy.** We suffer if we do not use, or worse, abuse the gifts God has given us, and that suffering persists if we don't turn back to God for mercy. If you continue to suffer from sins of the past, bring those sins to God for mercy and healing. Then, use the gifts God has entrusted to you.

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**Wed, Jul 3:** "Through (Christ Jesus) the whole structure is held together; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God" (Eph 2:19-22). He is the foundation, the cornerstone, the mortar, the steel beams, the tent poles. This whole crazy structure called Christianity is held together by Jesus. There have been parts torn down and rebuilt, disagreements among construction workers, and different materials used. But these are our issues, not Christ's. In him, we are called to be built as one, not hiding in our alcoves or wings, but growing together. **Provision: Learn about Christianity.** Do you focus more on what divides Christians than unites us? Consider learning about another branch of Christianity. Look at what's the same and what is different and why. Focus on the basic teachings of Christ. Think about joining a bible study or serving the poor with people from other denominations.

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**Thu, Jul 4:** To Amos, Amaziah said: "Off with you, visionary, flee to the land of Judah! There earn your bread by prophesying" (Am 7:10-17). The Book of Amos is exhausting to read. Amos' focus is the social inequality that exists in Israel. One can understand why the priests and kings of Israel didn't want to listen to his warnings. **Provision: Listen and discern.** No one likes challenges to the way they are living. Most people are more concerned with their own little lives and the troubles of today. Who are the prophets today? To whom do you listen? Do you take time to discern their messages and consider how what they say will play out in the future?

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**Fri, Jul 5:** "Go and learn the meaning of the words, I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Mt 9: 9-13). Matthew has Jesus quote the prophet Hosea as he speaks to the Pharisees. They complain about Jesus ignoring ritual purity laws. In the hierarchy of Jewish law in Leviticus, ritual purity falls below the rules for sacrifice. Jesus is telling the crowd mercy supersedes the laws concerning sacrifice. **Provision: Show mercy.** Mercy is first and foremost. It is the perfection of God Jesus calls us to. If you check all the ritualistic and sacrificial boxes, but cannot show mercy (and remember, mercy is more than forgiveness), reflect on this passage. Pray that Jesus will help you learn the meaning of these words.

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**Sat, Jul 6:** "Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss" (Ps 85). "The truth hurts." "No justice, no peace." God presents another way for us, so different from our human tendencies. At times, it seems hopeless, so far from the reality we see played out on our screens. But each of us can make God's vision come to life. **Provision: Be kind. Promote peace.** Being kind doesn't mean we roll over or avoid calling out lies when we hear them. Promoting peace doesn't mean going along with the status quo. It is how we approach injustice and deceit with love and mercy in our hearts. How will you show kindness today in the face of lies and resistance?