

4th Sunday in Easter (B)

04/26/2015

Many years ago - seemingly - I was actively involved with **Youth Ministry**. The **Youth Center**, in which I worked, offered four or five retreat weekends each year called **Search**. (Its full name is: **A Search for Maturity**.) Some of the young people who had previously experienced a **Search** would meet over a six to eight week period of time to plan the talks and exercises that would be used on the retreat weekend.

One of the talks given on the retreat was entitled: *'Who Am I?'* The full title of the talk - that sometimes went unnoticed, or was too complex for the young people - was *'Who Am I According to God?'* Some of the young people were attracted to the talk. Others shied away. Many of those who shied away instinctively knew that they would **struggle** preparing and presenting such a talk.

Many of those who were attracted to the topic focused primarily on **information** about themselves and their families, and their **likes** and **dislikes**. Many of those who shied away from the topic shared **information** and their **struggle** in knowing who they are *'according to God.'*

Our second reading (from the **First Letter of John**) and our **Gospel** (from **John**) also raise the question, *'Who are we... according to God?'* We too tend to determine who we are by using several **indicators** such as skin color, sexual orientation, and economic status. Naturally, there are numerous other **indicators** too, such as, ethnic background, intelligence, business success, and some **negative indicators** too, such as, abuse, having an impediment, experiencing devastating loss at an early age.

Though these **indicators** - like the **information** offered by the young people - do tell us who we are, they are **too limited** to provide us with enough **information**. These **indicators** are **too incomplete** to provide us with a **complete** picture. The question: *'Who are we... according to God?'* is answered differently by the **First Letter of John** and the **Gospel of John**.

They both tell us that the **most complete** answer (which contains all other answers) is: **we are created by God in the 'image and likeness of God.'** When we **willingly practice knowing** ourselves in this way, we begin to see that the other **indicators** - though sometimes important - are **insignificant** in and of themselves and are only a **part of the information** that **encompasses** them all.

The **struggle** that we may **encounter** when we ask the **question** often comes from the many other **voices** that are part of our everyday life. They **bombard** us with **urgent** and **immediate** needs, hurts, failures and successes. They **push** us to **practice** living as though we are **independent** rather than **interdependent**. They **harangue** us until we focus primarily upon our **likes** and **dislikes**, and tell us that our **likes** and **dislikes** **determine** who we are.

It isn't **important** how often we **listen** to these other **voices**. What is important is our **willingness to practice listening** to the **voice** who tells us that **we are more than these others voices tell us that we are**. That is, a **willingness** to remain in the **struggle**, to stay with the **question**, and not **too quickly** to accept an answer. This results in more **uncertainty and doubts**, and - ironically - a **greater capacity** to withstand the **'winds that come against us.'**

Saint Teresa of Avila reminds us that the pathway that leads us to God is the same pathway that shows us who we are; and the pathway that shows us who we are is the same pathway that leads us to God.