

3rd Sunday of Lent 2010

Fr. Bob VerEecke, S.J.

If you think the homily I'm going to give is "strange", if after you hear me, you say to yourself "what in the world was that all about?", I won't be surprised. For it will be "strange" and I too wonder "what in the world it's all about". But then again, I hope you had a similar response on hearing today's scriptures: Strange? A bush burning and not consumed, the voice of God speaking from the bush to a sometime shepherd whose life would never be the same because of this encounter with a God who reveals and conceals at the same time. A very strange God, indeed. In deed.

So let me tell you about my most recent burning bush experience. It wasn't on a mountaintop or any place that we call "holy ground". It was on a stationary bike, peddling away, making progress and going nowhere. What was on my mind was the recent Chilean earthquake and the suffering of the people of Chile. But this was not an abstract reflection on human suffering and natural disaster, nor a question like "Where is God in this suffering", it was an experience of being very, very close to this suffering because of my Jesuit brothers and friends from Chile. The

closeness that I was feeling to the suffering of so many in this country had a human face and voice in each of those friends, brothers, whose lives would be changed because of this terrible tragedy, whose ministry to the people of Chile would be dramatically changed. In this reflection, peddling away, making progress but going nowhere, it was as if all the barriers of space and time were disappearing, and all I could think of was how close I felt to these friends in the “here and now”. Here and now. Space and time/ Close, closer, closest.

And then the word “Close” was resounding in my ears, drowning out the music I was listening to. “Close” brought me to the story of Moses, wanting to come closer, to inspect, to investigate, to probe, to delve into the mystery. He is fascinated by this phenomena of fire defying the ordinary laws of nature. He had to come closer to see for himself what in the world was going on. Of course he would find that it was “in the world but not of the world.” Strange in deed. But the voice that calls him by name tells him, “Do not come any closer”. This is Holy Ground. Take off your shoes. Moses could only come so close to the mystery. He had to keep his distance. The mystery was not meant to be comprehended, explained, interpreted but simply lived. The revelation of God was

in its essence, “I am the one who has heard the cry of my people”.
I am with them in their suffering. I am Deliverance.

And then strangely, still peddling away, making progress but going nowhere, it felt as if I were hearing the voice of God saying “ I am close to you”, Close, close, close. That one word echoing within my ears, my soul, my heart. Breaking through the barriers of space and time. Questions like “how close”, what is the distance between you and me in space and in time”. None of that mattered: In the here and now, peddling away on a stationary bike, making progress and going nowhere, there was this experience of “Closeness”, being filled with the spirit of God.

Hmmm. Strange and wondrous, unnerving and affirming, “What was that all about?” I’m still wondering. I’m still.... wondering.

But as Christians we know that God no longer says “Come no closer. You are on Holy Ground” In Christ God has come as close to us as humanly/divinely possible. In Christ we are God’s Holy Ground.

Strange and wondrous, unnerving and affirming. Yes.