

August 13, 2020

There is in Catholicism, though largely not understood or appreciated, the apophatic tradition, sometimes called the via negativa which maintains that "God" is ineffable, that there is nothing that we can say about "God" because there is no language, no words, capable of being used to talk about or describe our experience that many of us name as "God."

This apophatic tradition has been dismissed by conventional Catholicism more than likely I would suggest because it eliminates the "middleman" who has proprietary control over our talk of "God" and "God's workings."

But you and I both know the apophatic tradition well. When you look in on your sleeping child or you sit with a dear friend and simply share the same air wordlessly, you are engaging the apophatic approach.

There is a reality there, to be sure, but it is beyond words.

I imagine when lovers gaze soundlessly into the eyes of one another they are acting far more in the image of "God" than all of the preachers in the world.

I would suggest that a grandfather holding a sleeping grandchild is doing the "works of God" as "God" would do them.

I know that sitting silently at the bedside of a sick or dying friend or loved one is the apophatic tradition in practice.

There is no more meaningful condition of the unspoken presence of "God" than the gathering around a now speechless corpse that was the dwelling place of the Spirit.

So, while we love to think we know what we are talking about, especially those of us who are professional religious representatives of "God" we should more often than not be silent and get ourselves out of the way so that the Great Mystery might be revealed.

For many of us, our experience with the workings of the Church has given us the impression, the notion, perhaps, the conviction and belief that as the Church works, so does God but me thinks that might be a bit of an overreach.

In the first reading last Sunday, Elijah, quite pleased with himself after slaughtering the priests of the pagan "God" Baal, goes up the mountain looking to be congratulated by "God" no doubt, but Elijah is met with the question from "God," "Why are you here?" which I think would be more accurately rendered, "Elijah, what the hell do you think you are doing?!"