

## GLIMPSE

### God's Living Room

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I was displeased more than somewhat recently when two separate persons revealed to me their disappointment at their displeasing God! They really did believe that they made God sad by their actions. Their actions may have made themselves sad, but God? Upon further investigation they were not sure what God did with God's sadness nor how quickly did God recover happiness.

These images of God have their foundations in the early years of life and education. My own dear father was a lawyer and accustomed to strict judgements according to the law. As oldest son, I grew up quite concerned about my never having to present myself before the Bar of Justice which was easily and conveniently erected in our living room. Displeasing him, especially by neglecting household duties was a condition to be avoided. Our mother was the dispenser of mercy and always seemed pleased with us, no matter what the evidence requiring Justice might be.

My kid-brother, Mike, came home one afternoon from the beach and my mother noticed a small round burn-hole in the towel. Mike convinced our mother that the burn was caused by the sun's shining through his glasses which he had placed on the towel while he was in the lake. It seemed to us that she forgot that Mike's glasses had two lenses, but there was only one hole. A mother's love redefines mercy. "Ah" you ask what did my father say, decide, judge? The case was delayed to years later when my father quite enjoyed the recounting of the solar phenomenon.

My father's being pleased seemed to me to be a silence. I washed the family car every Saturday, mowed the lawn this way and that to make sure no blade felt neglected, shoveled the sidewalks and driveways all done dutifully and with some pride. At the time I was unaware of the necessity of pleasing my father; it just was what was needed to do.

Years later, during an eight-day retreat before ordination, I began praying with my image of God. The end result was I became grateful that God was not at all like the image I had of my loving father. I reflected upon how I was still being a dutiful disciple of a Fatherly God Who counted every shovelful of work I offered and

every little blade of observance I could execute. I did love and still love doing things, producing, getting things done, but the big question was about "why?" Who was I working for, who was watching.

It is a quite natural thing to work with images whose bases are in our pasts. We work with the new, because we have pasts. Parents are the first images of God or the Beyond or the Mysterious. Perhaps the spiritual life is spent in recovering, or rearranging formative images. I could suggest names of persons, places and objects and because of your history, images would arise which would be quite specific to you. God! Where do you go for that picture? We do grow comfortable with our conditioned names and activities for persons and things. We live along with them whether those images are accurate or not. Many of us grew up with negative images of Japanese, Germans, Jews, people of color, because we had such limited experiences of these others. Through life's experiences, those images, at least for me, have changed. Those people have become real. Images seem to shrink in importance through encounter and proximity.

Finding pleasure in what we do is healthy. Being displeased with what we do that is not good, that is healthy. Believing that God is happy or unhappy about our actions is theologically incorrect. God's living room is our living-spaces and no matter how many burn-holes there are in the towels of our lives, God's love is even more hopeful than the mother who looked with one eye of understanding and with the other eye of love. Our prayer is not meant to reinforce past images of God, but rather the experience of our being freed to be met with our towels in hand by a God Who is imageless. It is only a glimpse, thank you God for not being my father.