

**SEPTEMBER 4, 2016**

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH**

**THE HOLY PROPHET MOSES—SEPTEMBER 4**

**“GOD COMES, GOD CALLS”**

Sometimes God comes us in very special ways. And sometimes God calls us to something specific for Him.

A priest had a day off. He had been pretty frazzled and worn out lately and decided he really needed a day off for a break. A total day off is sometimes a hard thing for a pastor to get; a real achievement sometimes! But he thought he had succeeded---no appointments, no phone calls to make, and he promised himself he would only check e-mails and texts one time that day. So he really was relaxing and enjoying his free time. He decided to spend some time in prayer. In his prayer time, he felt that God was especially close to Him that day---it was a very special time of communing with the Lord. Then in the midst of God's drawing so close to him, he started having an idea pop over and over into his mind---“Call Debbie, call Debbie” Debbie was a young, sickly, and very poor single mother in the parish. He talked to her often and he and the parish did all they could to help her, but it seemed like nothing ever went right with her. And when he talked to Debbie, it was usually a long conversation! He resisted the idea because it was his day off. But he finally decided it must be God, whom He was having such a special time of prayer with, who was calling him to call Debbie.

So he called her---and sure enough, it was a very long call. Another crisis had come her way---her car had broken down and she was having trouble getting it fixed. She was an emotional wreck from all the stress she was in. The priest spoke to her encouragingly and gave her some practical advice on how to deal with the car problem. Finally, after a long talk, he hung up the phone and tried to get back to his “day off”.

A few days later he talked to her after a church service. With great gratitude she told him he had saved her life. That day when he called her? She was in such despair she was just about to walk into the bathroom, get out some pills she had there, and kill herself. His calling her out of the blue had shown her she wasn't alone in the world—that there were people, including the priest, that cared about her. And that God still loved her. So she didn't kill herself. (in “Our Daily Bread”, 4/11/09)

God came to that priest that day in his time of prayer. And then God called him to do some work for God---to call Debbie so that her life could be saved.

Today, September 4, is the day our Orthodox Church commemorates the Holy Prophet Moses, one of the greatest of the Old Testament Saints. God did many wonderful things through Moses---the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt, many miracles, the giving of the Law, etc., etc.

Moses' work for God began when he was called by God in Exodus 3. God came to Moses in a special way that day---and then He called Moses to work for Him.

At that time, the Hebrew people had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. But Moses had

a wealthy upbringing. Through a series of events I won't explain now he ended up being raised by the Pharaoh's daughter in the royal palace---in the lap of luxury. But yet he remembered who he was---a member of the oppressed Hebrews. After he became an adult he one day saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew man. Moses lost his temper---he killed the Egyptian. That meant he had to run for his life to avoid arrest, so he fled into the wilderness of Sinai. And there he worked as a shepherd, caring for the sheep of a man named Jethro.

One day Moses was tending his flock at Mt. Sinai. And God came to him that day. He appeared to Moses in a burning bush. The bush kept burning but was not burned up, not consumed by the fire. We read in Exodus 3: 2-6 about what happened---God appeared to Moses "in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and lo, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. And Moses said, 'I will turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, 'Moses! Moses!' And he said, 'Here am I.' Then He said, 'Do not come near; put off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.' And He said, 'I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."

God came to Moses---as a fire burning a bush, but the bush was not consumed. And then God told Moses His Name, as we read in verses 13-14---"Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me 'What is His name?', what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' And He said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

God told Moses His Name---"I AM THAT I AM' God IS. He really exists and He came to Moses that day---in a bush that burned but was not consumed.

God comes to us, too. He does that in many ways, maybe similar to how he especially blessed that priest when he was praying on his day off. Most importantly, God comes to us at every liturgy, in the Holy Eucharist, Holy Communion, when the Lord is present in the Body and Blood of the sacrament.

In the Holy Eucharist, bread and wine are transformed by the Holy Spirit into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. God comes to us very directly, indeed, and we partake of Christ as we eat and drink. We take God into our lowly selves!

And just as the bush wasn't consumed by God's fire, so we are not consumed by Christ's Body and Blood. But we do pray about this! As we don't want to be burned up! In the fifth of the pre-Communion prayers in the little red service book (the one in the pew racks), on p. 208, the prayer reads, "I, most sinful, dare to partake of Thy whole Body. Let me not be consumed." God answers that prayer by allowing us to partake and *not* be consumed. You would think receiving just might consume us---that taking the Lord into ourselves would burn us up. But instead, we are blessed, not destroyed.

God reached out to Moses that day in the desert. He showed Moses that he wasn't alone at Mt. Sinai. He showed Moses that he and the Hebrews were very important to God. By the burning bush, God showed Moses His presence, His power, and His reality.

God came to Moses that day....and then that day He called Moses. The two often go

hand in hand. God comes to us, God calls us. That's what happened to Moses. In verses 7-9 of Exodus 3 God describes how the Hebrew people were being oppressed by the Egyptians. And then He calls Moses to serve Him by helping the Hebrews---in verse 10, God says to Moses: "Come, I will send you to Pharaoh so that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." God calls Moses to do God's work. He says, "I will send you."

Moses hemmed and hawed some about this call, but he obeyed. And God did many, many mighty works through Moses in the years ahead. We won't go through all those works now due to lack of time, but read Exodus and you'll see them. Or watch "The 10 Commandments" and let Charlton Heston and Yul Brynner give you the story.

God came to Moses through the burning bush. God then called Moses to do His work. Moses obeyed---and God's work got done.

God came to Moses. And God comes to us. At every liturgy, in the Holy Eucharist He comes to us. He shows us His reality, His love for us, and His miraculous power when he changes our bread and wine into the Body and Blood of His Son.

And when He comes to us, He calls us. He calls us to go out from here to serve Him.

We see this in some of the prayers of the liturgy.

At one point we pray—"that to those who partake thereof (*referring to the Body and Blood of Christ*) they may be unto the fulfillment of the kingdom of heaven" Here we are called to help in the fulfillment of the kingdom.

Another prayer in the liturgy calls us to be "those who bear fruit and do good works in Thy holy churches, and who remember the poor." Bearing fruit, doing good works, helping the poor---some of the things God calls us to do after receiving Holy Communion.

At another point in the service we pray to God to help us do well in serving Him—"Make straight our path....make firm our steps." We should walk in the Lord, on a straight path, with firm steps---so that we may do good work for Him.

There is much work in the world to be done for God. In the liturgy, God comes to us in the Eucharist. And then He calls us to do His work. Are you doing some of it?

Maybe you think you're incapable of doing much..... People often say---"Oh, I can't do that. I don't know how..... I'm not capable.....etc., etc." Even Moses tried to back out at first. As we read in Exodus 3:11---"But Moses said to God, 'Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?'" God had a very good answer for Moses in verse 12---"But *I* will be with you." And He will be with you and me, too, when we answer His call and serve Him.

Today, God will come to us as He came to Moses. He came to Moses in a burning bush. He will come to us in bread and wine changed into Jesus' Body and Blood. And God will be calling us to serve Him just as He called Moses to do so.

So, today, after you've communed----while you're still here at church, or on your way home, or this afternoon..... Think and pray: God, what would You like me to do for You?

The answer could be lots of different things:

---it could be to go help that elderly neighbor...

---it could have to do with that church ministry or project where someone is needed to serve...and you know you could do it if you decided to.....

--it could be deciding to become one of our lay visitors and make occasional visits to our shut-ins. We sure need more lay visitors because we have more shut-ins than before...  
---it could be as simple as helping clean up more at church...  
---it could be going out of your way a bit to speak with someone who usually seems quite alone and lonely----whether at work, at school, or even here at church.  
---for someone, it could be a call from God to be a priest.....

The list of what God might call you to do could go on and on..... If you sincerely and often pray---“God, I wish to serve you. Show me what you want me to do.”---He’ll show you before long. He will call you.

Today we honor the great and holy Moses. God came to him in a very special way---in that bush that burned but didn’t burn up. God will come to us today, too , in a very special way---in the Body and Blood of His Son.

When God came to Moses, then He called him to work for Him and serve Him. And, when He comes to you, He is going to be calling you, too. Be open to hear the call. If you don’t hear it, ask Him to reveal His will to you. Seek His will for you. And when you know what His will is, obey His call.

And He will, by His infinite grace and power, help you serve Him just as He helped Moses serve Him.