

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

EXODUS 33, MATTHEW 5:8

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God, but who can ever actually attain a heart pure enough to gaze upon the Holy One?

In Exodus 33, we see a dramatic picture of the nature of God's holiness. In his mercy he tells the Israelites that he will not continue with them toward the Promised Land because his holy presence will destroy the stubborn sinful people. When Moses goes to meet with God, he must set up his tent of meeting outside the camp to keep the presence of the Holy One separate from the sin inside the camp. Those who wish to consult with God have to leave the camp, for they cannot remain in sin and draw near to his presence. A holy God must remain, as some say, wholly other than imperfect creatures.

Even Moses, the chosen leader who speaks with God as with a friend, cannot look upon the face of the Holy One. Just as we cannot stare at the sun without going blind, not one of us in our human condition can see God and live. Still, we can catch glimpses of the sun. We can feel its warmth and live by its light. In the same way, our holy God makes his presence known to his people: a burning bush, a pillar of fire, a still small voice.

In his mercy, the Lord also allows for an intercessor to stand in the gap. Moses pleads with God to allow his presence to remain with the stiff-necked Israelites, and when God sees their true repentance, he relents. In time Jesus would come as the ultimate chosen One, living a sinless life and through his death and resurrection opening the door for us to have a personal relationship with the Holy One. Like Moses, he intercedes for his people, yet he also makes a way for us to be holy, to be pure in heart so that we too can see God. Perhaps we will not see him in all his fullness on this side of Heaven, but one day in glory we will see him for who he truly is.

In the meantime, like Moses, we too can see God's goodness pass before our eyes. We see his mighty deeds and his mercy lived out every day, and we too can commune with him "face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus 33:11). Just as Moses's face shines with light in Exodus 34 after his encounter with God, so our relationship with God can be seen on our countenance, pointing those who remain encamped in sin to the Holy One who wants to dwell in their midst.

Today God is once again inviting us into his presence, but let us not forget what a privilege it is to approach his throne. Let us bow in gratitude before the One who made the way for us, and let us invite him to give us a pure heart so that we—and those we encounter throughout our day—may catch another precious glimpse of our Holy God.