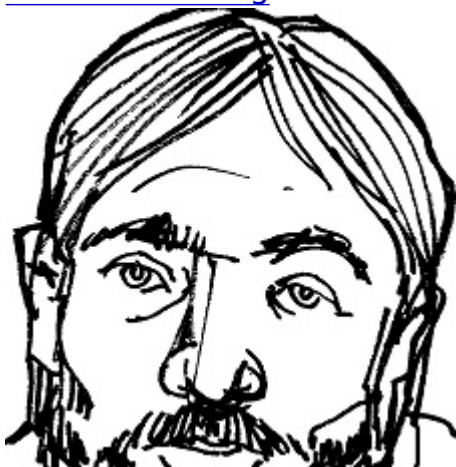


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by Pat Marrin

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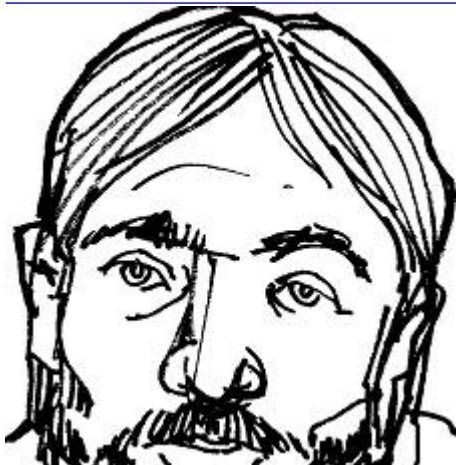
[patrickjmarrin@gmail.com](mailto:patrickjmarrin@gmail.com).

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“If I find favor with you, O Lord, do come along in our company” (Exodus 34:9).

Pope Francis has often described faith not as adherence to a list of credal statements but as an experience of encounter and dialogue. Our faith is an intimate and living conversation with God. This is evident in the Bible, whose main narrative is made up of encounters and dialogues as God reveals himself and his intentions to the patriarchs, prophets and leaders who respond on behalf of the community.

Today’s Exodus reading is a marvelous, almost cinematic, account of Moses’ face-to-face meetings with God in a tent outside the camp of the Israelites during their desert sojourn. Moses is instructed by God to create the tablets of the Law, which the Hebrew Bible regarded as the living presence of God. The Torah is revered as the “real presence” for Jews in much the same way that the Eucharist is revered by Catholics.

Moses’ meetings with God required him to wear a veil because of the brilliant imprint of divine glory he retained. A human creature came so close to the ineffable “face” of the Creator that the people had to be shielded. This same mystery is described when Elijah encountered the divine presence passing by as he hid in a cleft of the rock during an earthquake, wind and fire (1 Kgs 19).

When applying these texts to Jesus, the evangelists were proclaiming him as divine, the Word of God, the visible icon of the invisible God. His transfiguration on Mount Hermon is a link back to the Exodus account and it reveals the Incarnation, the central mystery of the Christian faith, that God is revealed in Jesus. The gradual approach of humanity toward divinity that began with Adam is now complete and in seamless unity in the person of Jesus.

The Second Vatican Council rescued this intimate encounter with God for us when it affirmed that the Real Presence of Jesus is found not just in the eucharistic species, but also in the Word, in the presider and in the faith community. The Incarnation touches all of us because we are in communion with Jesus.

We enrich our reading of the Scriptures by recognizing the many encounters and dialogues that make up the readings. God is constantly seeking to engage us in conversation, in parables, questions and loving overtures. Come closer. Don’t be afraid. The hidden face of God is revealed when we open our eyes with faith, love and trust in Jesus. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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