

Donnybrook/Pro-Cathedral

15 December 2021

Welcome

St Augustine of Hippo was a gifted writer and he could say a lot in a little. Once, he was speaking about God and our image of God and he asserted plainly: if you have understood, it is not God. In other words, if I think I've "got" God, somehow, I'm in more trouble than I think!!

Topic

The remark of St Augustine can help us today in three ways.

Steps

First of all, when we use words to name or describe God, we are using something from our experience to point to God who is beyond our experience, our minds and our words. We say God is a father...yes, but in a way beyond all our experience of parenthood. We say God is love...yes, but in a way beyond all our experience of love. And so on. We need to correct ourselves continuously, so that we find ourselves dealing with an idol made in our own image.

Secondly, it has been said, by many great spiritual figures, that the natural language of God is silence and everything else is a translation. There's a lot to be said for silence: prayer, ultimately, is sitting silently in the presence of God, holding ourselves before the Mystery. A breakthrough occurs when we set aside our agenda and wishes and simply wait on God – very much in the spirit of Advent.

Thirdly, none of this means we cannot be near to God and God near to us. On the contrary, once we do realise the limits of our understanding and hold ourselves in silence before the Mystery, we are closer than ever to God as God really is. As St Augustine also said, God is closer to us than we are our ourselves. He said (disarmingly) of his own spiritual journey: while I was abroad, all along you were at home.

Conclusion

Perhaps these few words will help us appreciate words in today's first reading.

Apart from me, all is nothing.
I am the LORD, unrivalled.
There is no other God besides me.
Turn to me and be saved,
All the ends of the earth,
For I am God, unrivalled.