



Theology Corner

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Theological Reflections by Paul Chutikorn - Director of Faith Formation

“Does God Have Emotions?”

In response to a potential misconception regarding a previous Theology Corner about “Why we Pray,” I wanted to provide a little clarification about what we mean when we say that God does not have emotions. I think the common response after hearing this is that God is some kind of static being that cannot be related to since he is unmoved and thus unchangeable. Then, questions arise such as: “Doesn’t the bible say that God hates sin?” and “Doesn’t God love?” This would seem to show that he *does* have emotions, but we have to consider what an emotion really is. An emotion or “passion” is a *response* to some object or situation. For example, if someone harms me, I get angry. This is an emotional response to an injustice that has been done to me. But we know that God is perfect, and therefore unchangeable and unmoved. In other words, nothing can affect him so that he is happy at one moment and angry at another moment. If he wasn’t these things, then he wouldn’t be God. This is his nature. Being that God is unchanging, when we speak of God hating sin, we mean that he infinitely hates sin. The reason he hates it is because 1) it is against his nature entirely 2) because sin separates us from him. God doesn’t want us to be separated from him because he created us for himself. It is his infinite and unchanging desire for us to be united to him. Remember, he is infinitely *perfect*. This means he doesn’t actually need us at all. But he loves us so much that he *wants* us to have pure happiness in being united with him.

We always talk about the fact that no matter how much we sin against him, God never stops loving us and never ceases to call us back to him. This is because he cannot *stop* loving us at one moment and begin loving again at the next. For God’s love to change, it would have to be in the direction of *less* love. So, in reality, the fact that he doesn’t have emotions is actually a good thing! When we say that God loves, this is because it is his very nature to love – as we see in the Gospel of John, God **is** love. We can make sense of this in knowing that God doesn’t just have reactions to things that we do, but his “reactions” are infinite in that they embody his very essence. Does this make it more difficult to relate to him? Well, it depends on how you look at it. In one sense, we could never even scratch the surface of who God is, but in another, we can see that this was a major reason for the Incarnation! Christ quite literally made God visible to mankind. We can relate to Christ because not only is he the Second Person of the Trinity, but he is also man. In his humanity, he of course had emotions (just watch Passion of the Christ!), but in his divinity, he is unchanging. If you take any of this to mean that we are in some way detached from him, you couldn’t be farther from the truth. He is the principle of our existence. The very fact that anything exists at all is through an intimate participation in God’s existence, since he is existence itself.

If you want to explore this concept further, feel free to research into the Doctrine of Divine Simplicity, or just join in on the conversation in the Theology Corner discussion group on the MyParish app.