

For a lack of a better description, the British Scientist and popular author, Richard Dawkins could be described as an evangelical atheist. Through his teaching, lectures and writings he attempts to spread the non-belief in God to the masses.

Dawkins equates the word God with “Intelligent Designer” and so as he speaks about his idea of God that this idea is

“Refutable-but nevertheless grand and big enough to be worthy of respect. I don’t see the Olympian gods or Jesus coming down and dying on the cross as worthy of that grandeur. They strike me as parochial. If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than anything that any theologian or religion ever proposed.”

If there is a god it will be a whole lot greater than any religion proposed.

Here Dawkins’ problem with God is that our notions are too parochial, too earthy, not big enough, not out there enough to be worthy of an understanding of God as the intelligent designer of all things.

In our second reading today we have this enigmatic passage from the 1st letter of St. John,

“This is the one who came by water and the blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one who testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.”

Now St. John is not addressing an atheist like Dawkins but he is dealing with people with a similar mindset. Those who thought that God could not really appear in the flesh. Jesus could have come in the water, as Spirit, but his humanity, his flesh, was some sort of illusion. Could God really bleed, die like you and I? For some it just didn’t make sense. But St. John insists yes; he insists that the Spirit testifies that Jesus came in the water and the blood.

Today’s feast of the baptism of the Lord marks the end of the Christmas season and what do we commemorate at Christmas that God truly came in the flesh. Born of the virgin Mary and laid in a manger. Christmas is the feast of the incarnation Jesus is God, is man.

Today’s feast calls us to reflect on baptism. Through the waters of baptism, we receive the pledge that our humanity, our flesh will receive the gift of the Spirit.

Jesus shared in our life and so we will share in God's life. Through baptism we too hear the Father's voice claiming us as his children. You are my beloved; with you I am well pleased.

On January 7, in Canada, we observe the memorial of St. Andre Bessette. Brother Andre was a member of the Holy Cross Order, he was the force behind the building of St. Joseph's Oratory in Montreal. Brother Andre, who spent his life as the porter the door keeper for the school that his community ran was known as a healer. People flocked to him for healing in time of illness. There was a quote of his in the missalette on his feast day. "It is surprising that I am frequently asked for cures, but rarely for humility and the spirit of faith. Yet, they are so important." (repeat)

As people of Christian faith we may not see ourselves as Dawkins, not impressed with a poor vision of God. Nor may we be like the spiritualists that St. John was trying to correct. Jesus couldn't truly be God in the flesh, because how can God suffer?

But when we approach God what is our attitude. Be great, perform a miracle for me, cure me; lift me out of my pain; lift me out of this world. Or do we ask for humility and the spirit of faith so that, in fidelity to our baptismal promises we will truly follow Jesus.