



**Day 8 | Thursday, March 14, 2024**  
**Presenter: Matthew Pyrc, SJ**

One of the problems with the scriptures, or rather our reading & understanding of them, is that God often comes across as arbitrary, heartless & violent. Then we end up not wanting anything to do with God and we just chuck-it all out the window.

In the Jewish scriptures, sometimes God wants to destroy entire cities and countries or demands a sacrifice. I once had a lector tell me they refused to read the reading for the day at Mass because it promoted violence.

So what do you do with these passages? Is God really a wrathful God that wants to wipe people out? Is his ego really that fragile?

Not at all! It's the complete opposite of who God is. These texts, as biblical scholarship makes clear, are not always meant to be taken literally. They are *anthropomorphic* and *archetypal*. As Ron Rolheiser said, "Whenever they are read they could be preceded by the kind of

disclaimer we now often see at movies where we are told: No real animals died while making this film. So too, no real people die in these texts.”

First, these texts are anthropomorphic, meaning that in them we attribute our own emotions and intentions to God. Hence these texts reflect our feelings, not God's.

These texts are also archetypal, meaning that they are powerful, primordial images that explain how life works.

In our reading from Exodus, we pick up the story right after the golden calf incident and God is calling the people to account. The scene becomes a kind of courtroom and Moses is the defense lawyer.

God tells Moses - “Go down at once to YOUR people, they have become depraved.” God, here is like an exasperated parent in conflict with the kids! – “Deal with your child, cuz I just can’t right now.” It’s like God is saying, That’s not my circus, those aren’t my monkeys.

Then Moses reminds God of their past history together and tells him to be true to himself and promises. God relents and doesn’t let his wrath blaze against them. God is presented here as able to be influenced, changed, and as relational.

One of the beautiful things about the Jewish scriptures is that it presents God as personal. It lays the ground for love, freedom and an actual relationship. Which is what Jesus builds his preaching upon. God becomes this intimate father that he calls “abba”, which means daddy.

Then John’s gospel puts reality on trial again. This time Jesus is his own defense lawyer, he doesn’t have a Moses to do his job. Jesus calls his star defense person - John the Baptist. Jesus presents the miracles he has done as evidence. Then finally He presents the law in whom they claim eternal life and he tells them Moses, the lawgiver will accuse you..

Jesus also comes against their logic and behavior, telling them I don't seek human praise and all you do is accept praise for one another. In that mutual approval and back scratching, God cannot be found.

They have no real encounter with the holy. He basically tells them that you don't make any honest use of your own witness and your own internal evidence.

The reality that has been put on trial in both of these readings, is the reality of God. The grand, overarching narrative of who God is- as All loving, all merciful, all good. A good who is love itself and desires a love relationship with us. It's a personal relationship and God gives us graces to preserve that relationship.

The trial is completed and the verdict delivered. In the charge of heartless violence, God is found not guilty; because we are created by God who is love, created from that love, so that we may love. God saw what God had created and said it was very good.

That is who we are and we give testimony to that by how we live our life. It is the people who forget who they are from their creator. God promised to be our God and we God's people.

God who is infinite love and mercy only asks that we be true to ourselves, and love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourself.