Today we celebrate God. Not some divine attribute or beatific manifestation. Just God. Over the centuries we have developed many sophisticated definitional statements. One that captures most of the important aspects of God states: In God there are five attributes (immutability, impassibility, impeccability, incorruptibility, and infinity), four relations (paternity, sonship, spiration, procession from), three persons (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), two processions (sonship, spiration); one God; and no proof. As accurate (?) as this statement might be, one is not inclined to respond to such a litany, or any like it, with the response: ‘Thanks be to God!’

Today’s readings sketch a much clearer profile of God, one that we humans can better understand. The reading from Exodus follows the report of our Israelite ancestors’ apostasy in the desert. It seems that Moses was on the mountain with God longer than those at the foot of the mountain appreciated. With the help of Aaron, they fashioned a golden calf they then worshipped as the god who had brought them out of Egyptian bondage. The manner of God’s response tells us something very important about this God: “So the LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed: The LORD, the LORD, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in love and fidelity” (v.6). In the face of human sinfulness, our God is merciful. This is why we respond with words from the Book of Daniel: “Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our ancestors, praiseworthy and exalted above all forever” (v.52).

A comparable profile of God is found in the New Testament. Today’s passage from John assures us that: “God so loved the world.” We normally think of the world as human society. However, the Greek world is kósmos, and today we understand this word to include all of creation. For the original author it certainly meant all of humankind. In other words, all people have been embraced by the love of God. This suggests the scope of God’s love. The depth of this love is seen in the fact that the Son of God was given to us “so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life” (v.6). Like the mercy seen in the first reading, God’s love is nonjudgmental. Rather, it is life-giving. And it is not given only to those who deserve it, for no one deserves it. It is given freely out of divine mercy and loving kindness.

Having experienced God’s mercy and love, we are now to manifest that mercy and love to others, regardless of the color of their skin, the character of their social standing, the manner of their religious practice, even the quality of their moral rectitude. Our love and mercy must be as inclusive and nonjudgmental as is God’s. Paul ends his exhortation with the Trinitarian prayer: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Cor 13:13). This is why today we celebrate God.

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