Devotional Reflection, Wednesday, September 2, 2026
Proper 17, the week of the fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
The Rev. David W. Perkins, Th.D.

Being Yourself Transparently Before God

Key phrases for reflection from today's Gospel reading:
47Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God.' 48The Jews answered him, `Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?' 49Jesus answered, `I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. 50Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks it and he is the judge.

Daily Office Lectionary Readings (*BCP*, 982)
AM Psalm 38; PM Psalm 119:25-48
Job 12:1,14:1-22; Acts 12:18-25; John 8:47-59

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Martyrs of New Guinea. (See below.)

David's Reflections

The novelist Walker Percy once paraphrased the philosopher Kierkegaard in an interview. ". . . the only way to be yourself is to be yourself transparently before God." * Being ourselves transparently before God can feel very risky. I can recall a Monday night when I was teaching New Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and was serving a small church part time. I flew into the airport in New Orleans after having taught an extension class in Orlando, Florida, retrieved from the parking lot an old VW Beetle with a mechanical crank sun roof that was my play toy at the time, and headed the 11 miles to the church I was serving part time to make a couple of visits before going home.

The gasoline I had purchased was defective—it was contaminated with water. I got about five miles out into the swamp on Airline Highway between the airport and the church and the car died. On my knees in the dark with the carburetor disassembled, trying to remove the water, I felt the frustration of the moment and began speaking out loudly to God about my discontent with God's way of taking care of me and supporting my efforts as a pastor. It was a long and not very kind diatribe.

I certainly did not feel any better when all efforts failed and I had to walk in the dark to a pay phone and call for a tow truck (no cell phones at that point in time). The wait was filled with more of the diatribe. "I'm trying to serve you and strengthen this little church and this is the best you can do to support that, stranding me in the swamp." I had so much to say that there were no pauses for God to get in a word or two.

The religious leaders in this text are in a conversation with Jesus; they are voicing their unbelief. They were people of faith in God, and they had the privilege of dialogue with Jesus even though they lacked faith in him. We are people of faith, and we have that same privilege. Jesus responded to their unbelief. He will also respond to our faith, even if we are expressing our discontent. Even our complaints arise from the faith that God is listening. That's the beauty of this scene

Your dialogue may be about the circumstances of your life, it may be about your religious doubts, it may be about your struggles with certain theological ideas, it may be about some crisis in our world. In today's reading, Jesus' preexistence, a key aspect of the concept of the Trinity, was the issue. However obdurate we might judge Jesus' opponents to be, they did engage him directly in conversation. In that, they model our best way to lodge our complaints, objections, doubts, and dissent—speak directly with God in the second person, "YOU," rather than speaking about God in the third person, "he/she/God." Jesus, on the cross, did not say, "I wonder why God forsook me." He said, "My God, my God, why have *you* forsaken me." (Italics mine.) John the Baptist, in Matthew 11, did not say, "I wonder if Jesus is the One who is Coming." He sent his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are *you* the one who is coming or should we look for another?" (Italics mine.)

A dear friend and former staff colleague contracted COVID-19 in July of 2020. Several members of his family also were sick with the virus. His mother, a former parishioner in a church he and I served together in Atlanta, was sick with COVID and died while my friend and his brother also were sick. He could only say goodbye to her on the phone just before she died. We have spoken often since, and I know he had some rather painful conversations with God.

If Percy is correct, and I think he is, we must be ourselves transparently before God in order to be ourselves. If we are struggling with something in the creed, if we are angry about our circumstances, or if we feel lonely and abandoned, whatever the situation, we can resort to conversation. You may have to write it down, or you might

sit a chair opposite yourself and pretend that Jesus sits there before you.Then, just talk to that presence. Could that be the key to being yourself? The psalmists model that kind of spirituality. See Psalms 22 for a particularly vivid example. Jeremiah did as well. See his laments/conversations with God in Jeremiah 12, 15, and 20.

That night in the dark in the swamp below Lake Ponchartrain, God was with me and received my anger. It felt liberating to be able to be so direct and open, a moment of being myself transparently before God. That was not the last such moment, but it was a very important moment of greater freedom before God. I was being more fully myself before God.

* *Conversations with Walker Percy,* ed. Lewis A. Lawson and Victor A. Kramer (Jackson: MS UP, 1985), p. 110. Walker Percy, paraphrasing Søren Kierkegaard.

Collect of the Day, Proper 17, the fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost
Lord of all power and might, the author and giver of all good things: Graft in our hearts the love of your Name; increase in us true religion; nourish us with all goodness; and bring forth in us the fruit of good works; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*. (BCP, 233)

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Martyrs of New Guinea (died 2 Sep 1942 CE).
http://www.satucket.com/lectionary/Martyrs_New_Guinea.htm
https://prayer.forwardmovement.org/calendar/the-martyrs-of-new-guinea

Collect of the Feast of the Martyrs of New Guinea
Almighty God, we remember before you this day the blessed martyrs of New Guinea, who, following the example of their Savior, laid down their lives for their friends; and we pray that we, who honor their memory, may imitate their loyalty and faith; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen*

A Collect for Grace
Lord God, almighty and everlasting Father, you have brought us in safety to this new day: Preserve us with your mighty power, that we may not fall into sin, nor be overcome by adversity; and in all we do, direct us to the fulfilling of your purpose; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (BCP, 100)

For stewardship of creation
O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, for ever and ever. Amen. (BCP, 259)

A Prayer for Light
Almighty God, we give you thanks for surrounding us, as daylight fades, with the brightness of the vesper light; and we implore you of your great mercy that, as you enfold us with the radiance of this light, so you would shine into our hearts the brightness of your Holy Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.* (BCP, 110)

A Collect for Mission
Lord Jesus Christ, you stretched out your arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace: So clothe us in your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know you to the knowledge and love of you; for the honor of your Name. Amen. (BCP, 101)

Daily Office Gospel, John 8:47-59
47Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not
hear them is that you are not from God.' 48The Jews answered him, `Are
we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?'
49Jesus answered, `I do not have a demon; but I honor my Father, and
you dishonor me. 50Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who
seeks it and he is the judge.

51 Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see
death.' 52The Jews said to him, `Now we know that you have a demon.
Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, "Whoever keeps my
word will never taste death." 53Are you greater than our father
Abraham, who died? The prophets also died. Who do you claim to be?'
54Jesus answered, `If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my
Father who glorifies me, he of whom you say, "He is our God," 55though
you do not know him. But I know him; if I would say that I do not know
him, I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his
word. 56Your ancestor Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day; he

saw it and was glad.' 57Then the Jews said to him, `You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?' 58Jesus said to them, `Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am.' 59So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple.

Daily Offices in the Book of Common Prayer

Morning Prayer, Rite 2, page 75, *The Book of Common Prayer*
Noonday Prayer, page 103, *Book of Common Prayer*
Order of Worship for Evening (Vespers), p 109, *Book of Common Prayer*
Evening Prayer, Rite 2, page 115, *Book of Common Prayer*
Compline (Night Prayer), page 127, *Book of Common Prayer*
Daily Devotionals, page 136, *Book of Common Prayer*