

Claude Rochon, March 15, 2015

God amidst the shadows

Question: how can we recognize God's Presence in the shadows?

- In this context, the word "shadow" may seem to be somewhat negative when we consider it as a metaphor to express a spiritual reality
- But today I will emphasize the positive aspects of a shadow
- How does the dictionary define the word "shadow"?
- First, the most obvious, literal, fundamental definition:

A. (Noun) An area of darkness created when a source of light is blocked

- Light is needed to form a shadow
 - If there is a shadow, then there is light
 - If there is no shadow there is no light and we are in darkness
 - So shadow is a good thing: it implies that there is light, that we are in the light – spiritually speaking
 - That's what the apostle John is saying: "But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." (John 3:21)
 - God (the light) is there somewhere
 - Even though the word "shadow" may imply something bad (in me), it means I am in the light: God is there somewhere
- "A dark shape that appears on a surface when someone or something moves between the surface and a source of light"
 - The operative word here is "move"
 - If we are in darkness, we can move into the light
 - But sometimes we may want to remain in darkness because we are afraid of our shadow – like the proverbial groundhog
 - However, we have to realize that staying in darkness does not remove our imperfections, our failings... as symbolized by our shadow
 - It's just that we don't see them (maybe because we don't want to see them)
 - Moving into the light only creates a shadow – it does not create the imperfections
 - However, it allows us to see them (as much as we hate that), and make us more aware of who we really are... imperfections and all
 - But, most importantly, it puts us back into the light
 - Better be in the light than in darkness... even if it mean seeing my shadow
- A last thing about (literal) shadows
 - The higher the source of light (the sun, for instance), the shorter the shadow
 - At high noon, during the summer...
 - Another season or time of day...
 - But the higher the sun, the shorter our shadow
 - So we should keep the Son (!) of God high in our lives – let him have the highest place, the most important place in our lives
 - Because then our failings (our shadow) will not seem that important

B. A reflected image

- We are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27)
 - We are a “reflected image” of God... a “shadow” of God
- Moreover, in 2 Corinthians, Paul tells us that: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18)
- Not only are we created in the image of God but we are transformed day to day, from glory to glory

C. An imperfect and faint representation

- That’s us! That’s what we are! An imperfect and faint representation of God
- As the apostle John writes in his first letter: “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is”. (1 John 3:2)
- For the time being, we are but an imperfect and faint representation, being transformed daily from glory to glory, until we become like him

D. Shelter from danger

- The first two definitions:
 - Having a shadow
 - Being a shadow
- The third: being in the shadow... of God
- God’s shelter (from danger): “Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress” (Psalm 107:19)
- Another psalm: “Hide me in the shadow of your wings” (Ps 17:8)
- Isaiah: “In the shadow of his hand he hid me” (Is 49:2)
- In what is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible, John tells us: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16)
 - God’s shadow is a shelter from danger
 - Can you imagine a greater danger than “perishing”?
 - Can you imagine a greater shelter than God’s eternal life?

God so loved the world...

- While we may assent in a general way to the notion that God loves the world, it’s harder to believe that God actually loves us... loves ME!
 - We may think to ourselves:
 - Certainly God wouldn’t love me if He looked at my motivations, noticed my constant failures, or heard the thoughts in my mind (my “shadows”)
 - I’m not as gifted as this person.
 - I should pray more like that person.
 - I need to fix this and that in my life before God can truly love me
 - That’s because I focus on the shadow and not on the light
 - Both are part of the same reality: me
 - But am I focusing on the shadow or on the light?
 - God knows me even better than I know myself, ...shadows and all
 - Yet he loves me more than I will ever love myself

- “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world [nor me], but in order that the world might be saved through him” (John 3:17)
 - God saves us. He gives us shelter from death, bringing us into eternal life

E. (Verb) To follow and watch (someone who is doing a job) in order to learn how to do the job yourself

- That’s us! We follow and watch Jesus in order to do the job
- What job? “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life” (Ephesians 2:10)
- Our job is to do good works
- But how do we learn how to do it the best way possible?
 - We “shadow” Jesus, so to speak
 - We follow and watch him in order to learn how to do the job
 - One way is by reading the Gospels

So how do I find God in the shadows?

If we let the word “shadow” guide us...

1. Light is needed to form a shadow
 - So I should not be afraid of my shadow... imperfections and failings and all
 - Because it means I am in the light... God’s Presence
2. If I’m in darkness, I should move into the light
 - Then I will see my shadow
 - But it does not mean that I had no imperfections before
 - It just means I could not see them; I lived a lie
 - But living in truth brings me more into God’s Presence... because I am more myself – when I am in the light
3. The higher the source of light, the shorter the shadow
 - So I should keep the Son of God as high as possible in my life
 - So my failings, imperfections won’t seem that important
 - I find God in the shadow when I realize it’s not that important after all: I am focused on the light, not on my shadow
4. I am a reflected image of God
 - An imperfect and faint representation
 - But being transformed daily from glory to glory
 - I am in God’s Presence already, being in a sense his shadow
5. I should keep in God’s shadow
 - Where he shelters me from danger
 - I already am in his Presence
6. I should follow in Jesus’ footsteps
 - “Shadow” him, so to speak
 - In order to do the good works God has prepared for me
 - As I follow (“shadow”) Jesus, I am in His presence

Conclusion

- So there we are – shadows and all. The good news is that God meets us in these shadows.

- Oftentimes, it is not us who find God in those shadows. Instead, He comes to meet us. Actually, He has been there all along
- But God meets us in the place where we're under no illusion that we are good
- What He wants is for us to see ourselves with the compassionate and loving eyes with which He sees us... shadows and all