

The father of my son-in-law is a ruddy-faced, Boston Irishman and a fine golfer. When things go right for him (and on the golf course they usually do), he has a way of grinning and saying: "Is this a great country - or what?!" So, when we read in the Book of Exodus about the Israelites in the desert despairing over their lack of water, we can just hear them complaining to Moses: "Is the Lord among us - or not?!" And when Moses finally finds the right rock, and thumps his staff upon it, bringing forth a gush of clear water, can't you hear those same Israelites shouting out: "Is this a great desert- or what?!"

I know it is supposed to be oil, not water, that is on the minds of all of us in this country. But it's not that the subject of water has been absent from our newspapers and TV screens. In this country we have seen flood after flood. And, recently, floods have hit countries as far apart as England and India, with devastating results. And, of course, it is the very absence of water that is the plight of so much of eastern Africa.

There was a strong recent article in the Post by Carlos Pascual and Strobe Talbott, Talbott being a former under-secretary of state. Listen to their warning: "The Earth is on a trajectory to warm more than 4 1/2 degrees Fahrenheit by around mid-century. Exceeding that threshold could trigger a series of phenomena: Arable land will turn into desert, higher sea levels will flood coastal areas....Manhattan and Florida would be under water, while Nevada would have no water at all. Countries such as Bangladesh and Mali do not have the resources to mitigate or even to adapt to the impact of climate change; millions would flee coastal flooding and the desertification of farmlands, creating instant 'climate refugees'."

In the face of such grim prospects, it would not be surprising to find many persons asking: "Is the Lord among us - or not?!" But that question, I believe, has it backwards. Our question shouldn't be "Is God with us?" but, rather, "Are we with God?" That is, are we sleeping, or are we really alive to the situation before us, and possible approaches to it? Clearly we as a people have been sleeping for some time as the present financial crisis has built up and burst upon us. But what about the crisis of global warming that we can foresee? What - as religious persons - are you and I readying ourselves to do about it?

What did Moses do when the desperately thirsty people demanded, "Give us water to drink"? At first he tried to quiet the people by making them feel ashamed that they were quarreling with him, their caring and loyal leader. When that didn't seem to work, he tried to cow them by accusing them of daring to "test the Lord." But their thirst and their fear of death were stronger than their fear of Moses or even of God. And Moses, realizing this, abandoned his authority based on the past, when he led his people out of Egypt and across the Red Sea. He opened himself up to new, but as yet unknown, possibilities of the future.

The story has it - as bible stories often do - that Moses received detailed instructions from God as to where he might look and actually cause an unseen source of water to flow freely. But what is compelling is that Moses had to attempt something entirely new and unproven. He had to become a prospector and an engineer which demanded skills he hadn't yet developed. He must have started off feeling like a fool, and fearing that failure would make him not only jeered but hated. And yet off he went, and probably a few other adventurers with him. Eventually water was found and a catastrophe was averted. Renewed was a people's faith in their own destiny, faith in their future. Above all: faith in the future. Do you and I have that? Let me find a more urgent way to pose that question.

After the end of the recent Olympics, Thomas Friedman, from Beijing, wrote a challenging column in The New York Times. "The Olympics," he said, "don't change history. They are mere snapshots....But as snapshots go, the one China presented through the Olympics was enormously powerful - and it's one that Americans need to reflect upon... China did not build the magnificent \$43 billion infrastructure for these games, or put on the unparalleled opening and closing ceremonies, simply by the dumb luck of discovering oil. No, it was the culmination of seven years of national investment, planning, concentrated state power, national mobilization, and hard work..." "I repeat," he goes on to say, "they did not get all this by discovering oil. They got it by digging inside themselves." Friedman then calls for "Americans to rebuild America....to get back to work on the only home we have." His conclusion is haunting: "I never want to tell my girls...that they have to go to China to see the future."

Do any of us want to tell our children or grandchildren that, for them, the future is not here? That's close to saying that there's no future at all for them. And no future at all for us. We might as well say that there is no God for us. For what is God but the possibility of the future? What is God but the creator of the future's possibilities? Who is God but our summoner into the future and into new life? Who is God but our companion through our life on earth that will end, for us, with our death? And who is God but the sustainer of our hope all along that this journey will have been worth the living?

Any people who abandon the possibilities of the future to others have abandoned their faith and their God. That is true of people of any time and of any place.

But, practically speaking, how do you and I live into the future? I mean, what might we do today that we didn't do yesterday? How would we ever know where to start?

I want to return to that article by Pascual and Talbott on the disastrous effects on water of unchecked global warming. Many catastrophes are unforeseen. But this is one that has been foreseen for some time now. Sure, we can protest that this is a political

matter, and is best left to the politicians. It is a political matter, but it is also profoundly religious. Global warming, like nuclear proliferation, would affect the future in extreme, possibly devastating ways. But the future is where God is summoning us. If we -you and I - walk out on this future, if we refuse or just fail to do what we can to honor and prepare for the future, then we might as well admit that our faith is empty.

Here I want to pose a serious question: Does religion as we know it - coming to worship, reading the bible, saying our prayers - does religion help us to move with God into the future? The three Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam - put a great emphasis on the past. Each has a primal story to tell, one that is written down and preserved for all time. But, do we get so caught up in remembering, telling and re-living the story of our religion, that we give little attention to the future?

More than half a century ago the theologian Paul Tillich wrote a book with a title that resounded through much of the Church, and continues to do so today. It is called "The Courage To Be." For almost four centuries this land and its people have, in remarkable ways, embodied the courage to be. The challenge before us, however, is whether we can embody the courage to be-come. Wouldn't it be something if religion were seen by us - and particularly by each young generation as primarily a movement dedicated to moving us into the future with courage and hope?

Last week at the nine o'clock service here we had the Rite-13 liturgy welcoming those recently turned thirteen into the beginning of their adulthood. And though I personally find this service rather wordy and quite churchy, I was very moved by the meaning of what was being celebrated, and particularly by the hands-on physical and spiritual guidance of those who are supporting these young adults. What a loss it will be if these our children, who aspire to life, come to see religion as concerned primarily with the past and not with their and the world's future!

I will end by going a step, a necessary step, further. What a loss it is, for those of us in our twilight years, if we see religion as holding on to the past! Remembering it - yes. Celebrating it - yes. But it's the future that we must reach to. It is there we are being called. And when our future on earth is over, we are still called beyond. Into what, we don't know. The Faure Requiem that will be sung here next Sunday afternoon calls it "In Paradisium" - into paradise. The question is, as always: will we be with God? Will we still be with God? Does it matter? Only faith can answer that question. Only faith, not as blind belief, but as a depth relationship, can answer that question. But blessed and most fortunate are those among us who, when facing that unknown beyond, will find themselves saying, "Hey! Is this going to be a great paradise - or what?"

Amen

