

THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD

ISAIAH 40:21-30

MARK 1:29-39

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DO ANY OF YOU REMEMBER AL MCGUIRE?

From 1964 to 1977 McGuire was the head coach of Marquette's men's basketball team. After his team won the national championship in 1977 he had the good sense to retire, knowing it couldn't get any better than that.

Like a number of retired coaches, Al McGuire then went into broadcasting. NBC attached him to Dick Enberg and Billy Packer. Enberg did the play-by-play, Packer did the serious analysis, and McGuire became the quintessential color commentator.

Born and raised in New York City, Coach McGuire spoke a language with which no one else was familiar. The *New York Times* called him "The James Joyce of the airways". Some examples of his expressions and their translation into English:

- Cupcakes-easy opponents
- French pastry-a showy move on the court
- Aircraft carrier-a big center
- Tap city-game over
- Cloud piercer-a guy who jumps really high.

Speaking of tactics in basketball he would say things like “Cut off the head and the body dies” Translation: stifle the point guard.

Reflecting his Roman Catholic upbringing, Coach referred to mistakes made on the court as sins- and the most serious one’s as mortal sins.

**WHILE THE BIBLE DOES NOT USE THE EXPRESSION
“MORTAL SIN,” IT CERTAINLY POINTS THEM OUT.**

For the writer of the Book of Deuteronomy, the mortal sin was forgetting, and consequently the principal virtue was remembering.

If forgetting is the ultimate mortal sin then most of us are in serious trouble.

- I get up out of my chair in the family room and walk into the living room. I stop, look around, and wonder why I came in there. Sound familiar?
- I go to introduce the wife of one of the firemen to a person visiting the fire house, and I blank on her name.
- Mary Elizabeth out of the blue asks me the name of Opal's sister in the comic strip Pickles. I spend the next thirty minutes going through the alphabet in my head to no avail. It's why we keep a list on our refrigerator of names we often can't remember (It's Pearl by the way).
- On my way out of town I plan to stop at the church to pick up something I need for a meeting. I remember it as I turn off onto Route 620 heading to Wytheville.

I could not doubt list many more, but I can't remember any at the moment.

FORTUNATELY FOR US ONLY A SPECIFIC KIND OF FORGETTING IS CONSIDERED A MORTAL SIN BY THE BIBLICAL AUTHORS.

The psalmist captured it with the words "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all of His benefits". Forgetting God and forgetting what God has done for us is the Biblical Mortal Sin. It is a mortal sin not so much because it offends God, but because it is devastating to God's children. In fact, it is deadly.

In the passage from Isaiah that I read earlier, the prophet chastises the people for crying out to God "My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God". The People Israel have been carried off into exile. Their homes have been burned to the ground, their Temple has been razed, the walls of Jerusalem have been leveled. They have lost everything and consequently they are in the throes of despair. They believe they are dead; they have no future. No one and nothing can save them from their plight. Who can conquer mighty Babylon?

ISAIAH CALLS THEM TO REMEMBER WHO THEIR GOD IS.

He is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He sits high above the earth and even the mightiest of nations are like grasshoppers to Him. God's breath can blow them away like chaff. The people may be worn out, unable to move, but God "does not faint or grow weary". Equally important for his people to remember, "He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might, he increases strength".

When we are devastated by illness or loss, our minds are captured by them. When we are weak and vulnerable we have no strength to fight back. When we are confronted by serious problems we are tempted to curl up and die.

Isaiah calls us to stop focusing on our weakness and focus on the power of God. He charges Israel with forgetting the power and love of God, a power which created the heavens and the earth, a power which long ago delivered their ancestors from similar bondage in Egypt. Such forgetting is a mortal sin.

IT WAS ISRAEL'S MORTAL SIN; IT IS OURS AS WELL.

Religious forgetting is an interesting and devastating phenomenon. When things are going really well, we often forget God, since it is not at all apparent that we need Him. We become totally immersed in the bliss of the moment.

When things are going poorly we often forget God as well, focusing on the enormity of our plight and our problems, forgetting how God has helped us in the past when things seemed beyond help. We then become overwhelmed by worry and anxiety.

Isaiah is reminding us that hope emerges when we grasp God's power and remember his love for each one of us. Isaiah reminds us that God is not far off, He is near. Isaiah reminds us that God is with us and that God is for us.

We Christians must constantly remind ourselves that Jesus is Immanuel, that is to say "God with us". We must never forget his words that with God all things are possible.

REINHOLD NIEBUHR REFERRED TO HIMSELF AS A CHRISTIAN REALIST.

By that he meant that he was neither a cockeyed optimist nor a grim-faced pessimist. Niebuhr knew the tragedies of life, its devastating moments, the overwhelming set-backs. He lived through the Great Depression, World War II, and the cold war. He suffered a devastating stroke later in life. He would never say that if you love Jesus all will go smoothly.

But Niebuhr never forgot the power and love of God. Niebuhr knew that God was always with Him, if not to remove what threatened him, at the very least to stand with him to give him strength and courage. Had he known Al McGuire he might have put it this way:

The problems we face are not cupcakes. They are more like aircraft carriers. But this does not mean that it is tap city for us. For our God is a Cloud Piercer- and here Niebuhr would switch to Isaiah- therefore, He can give us wings to mount up like eagles; He can give us the

strength to run and not be weary, to walk and not feel faint.

He would lead us to say, "Thanks be to God who gives us the victory!"