
La Salette: what face of God?

October 2020

The Father-like face of God...

The question that introduces this new section is, from the biblical point of view, paradoxical. Paradoxical because, on the one hand, the question expresses the intrinsic human yearning for the transcendent, a relationship with the divinity, the search for God (see for example Am 5:4 and Ps 27:9; 42:3; 44:25; 67:2; 105:4). It is not by chance that the intercession or prayer of longing to see the face of Adonai is one of the recurring themes that occur throughout the pages of the Bible.

On the other hand, however, the Bible reminds us not only that he who “[...] sees God dies” (Ex 33:20), but that “no-one has ever seen God” (Jn 1:18; 1Jn 4:12). Even Moses, of whom Scripture reports that Adonai “[...] has spoken with Him ... face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex 33:11), does not benefit from the gift of seeing the face of God. As the matter of fact, his request (Ex 33:18) is not granted: on Sinai, Moses sees only Adonai’s shoulders, but not his face (Ex 33:23). It is clear therefore that, in the economy of the History of Salvation deposited in the scriptures of the biblical Israel, God has his own face, but hides it from human eyes. In short, the biblical texts constantly remind us of two leading features of Adonai: his face does not show itself, but speaks to man. Adonai’s face is the source of the word that is addressing man with the intention of revealing himself and into relationship with him and making himself known (see the experience of biblical Israel briefly described by the words of Moses in Dt 4:12). Secondly, Adonai’s face is experienced, but not seen. In this regard, although the testimony of biblical Israel is extremely rich and multi-layered, it converges around two dimensions. It is, in fact, a face that suffers with (*compassion*) and stands alongside those whose hearts are in misery (*mercy*) – see for example Ex 3:7; 34:7; 1K 22:17; Ps 144:8; Mt 14:14; 15:32; Lk 7:13.

In the New Testament times the human experience is now marked by something new: Jesus of Nazareth is understood as the one who satisfies the human longing to see the face of God. In the personal perception of the first Christians, the invisible God becomes visible – his face included – in Jesus of Nazareth. The invisible face of God is human-like in the son of Mary of Nazareth. And the Evangelist John reminds us of this unheard before newness at the very

beginning of his Gospel, when he writes: “No-one has ever seen God: the only Son who is God and is in the bosom of the Father who has made him known” (Jn 1:18).

Following this implicit logic of the evangelist John, it can be said that to see the face of Jesus of Nazareth is to see the face of Adonai, the face of the Father. And although sparingly mentioned (Transfiguration, entering Jerusalem and Passion (Mt 17:2; 26:39.67; Mk 14:65; Lk 9:29.51.53), when the four Evangelists refer to the face of Jesus, they always put him in relation to his identity, ministry and mission. It is intended there that his face declares, with firmness, compassion and mercy.

In the small French village of La Salette the spectacle and the presentations of the faces continues. The Beautiful Lady talks face to face with Maximin and Melanie. Just as the visible face of the Son refers to the invisible face of the Father, so at La Salette the mother’s face refers to the face of the Son. Like the Son, the mother's face, bathed in delicate tears, announces, with resolve, compassion, and mercy: «Come near my children, do not be afraid».

The Son-like face of God...

**“If my people do not want to submit,
I am obliged to leave my Son's arm free”**

The starting point of everything is that first yes that Mary gives to the bearer of the divine message, the Angel Gabriel. Since then, Mary has made herself available to God as clay in the potter’s hand. But rather than clay Mary consciously participates in this mission in her condition of the one “full of grace”. For Mary, God, the very self-one, sets out on the path of encounter with man, contrary to the figure of the repentant younger son of the gospel who returns embarrassed to his father’s house. To go to this encounter of man, that means to come to the meeting with us, is precisely the identifying character of the act of God, through the help of his mediators. The prophets zealously have been fulfilling the mission of making God present within the human community. At this point, Our Lady, in her apparitions, does nothing else but shares the greatness of the divine heart which, at all costs, calls man to discover that feeling of God who is happy to have men with him.

La Salette reflects, in splendour, the face of God. Not so much as in regard to the mountain, although many of the great events of salvation, carried by our Lord Jesus Christ, have much to do with the mountains. The message of La Salette raises in us the decision to return to this friendship with God often broken because of the mentality of the today’s man who is boasting himself the Christian and in fact being deprived of Christ and his gospel.

At La Salette Mary is the spokesperson for a wonderful Gospel-focused message. That is, the Beautiful Lady does not proclaim herself, before taking as her own the words that her lips transmit. Just look at this part of the message: *«If my people will not submit, I shall be forced to let fall the arm of my Son. It is so strong and so heavy that I can no longer withhold it. For how long a time do I suffer for you! If I would not have my Son abandon you, I am compelled to pray to him without ceasing; and as to you, you take not heed of it. However much you pray, however much you do, you will never recompense the pains I have taken for you».*

Nevertheless, the entire message is full of divine tenderness; it is a message transmitted by a person who can communicate with another human being, as it similarly happened with those present at the wedding in Cana, “do everything that he will tell you” (cf. Jn 2:5). It is good to know that in the message of the Lady in tears is well clarified to us the face of God who lovingly “follows” his creatures created in “his image and likeness” (Gn 1:26).

Rather than helping us to contemplate the face of God, the message gives us the opportunity to look at the mother of Jesus, always present in the life of the Church as the maternal face of God, because «it makes us feel better and better the tenderness of the Lord»¹. In fact, in agreement with Is 49,15, God proclaims that his love for his people is maternal and greater than that of any mother for her child; on the other hand, this category adapts to the needs of the present times when Mary responds by revealing the maternal face of God. It is God’s absolute will to send Mary into our human history as a messenger of prayer, conversion and spirituality: «The mariofanies know certain escalation in this regard, because in them the Virgin passes from words to tears and probably to bleeding. It is a cry from the Mother who takes on the shape of the prophecy and the apocalypse to stop the unreasonable steps of so vast part of the world and to show in her the merciful face of God who is Love»².

The Mother-like face of God...

During the first stage Maria covers her face with her hands, in a gesture that hides the tears. During the apparition the face of the Beautiful Lady is barely visible to Melanie and totally imperceptible to Maximin because of the strong light that emanated from Mary’s face. Talking to the children, she continued shedding her tears and was very sad. This impression takes hold of both witnesses who listened to her message.

¹ *Maria, rosto materno de Deus!*, <https://www.a12.com/academia/artigos/maria-rosto-materno-de-deus>, (2020.08.11).

² S. DE FIORES, «Apparizioni», in *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizionario*, EDB, Bologna 2008, I, 59.

The Mother of the Lord who appears at La Salette, represents Heaven, our final destination. She is afflicted by the fact that we abandon God and do not accept what His Son, Jesus, has done for us. She also grieves that we do not accept, as she did, the grace of God that can make each one of us also such a person for whom «the Almighty has done great things».

At La Salette Mary reminds us of the fact that her being with soul and body in Heaven is also the result of God's great mercy towards a man. She, Immaculate in her Conception, had experienced mercy in advance, because by virtue of the fullness of grace she was preserved from the original sin, keeping within her that divine reflection of holiness, of which she has not been deprived since her conception.

We, on the other hand, can again receive this divine reflection in us also by virtue of the grace we have received. As a reminder, it happened because Adam and Eve have deprived us of this divine reflection for their disobedience. At this point it is worth mentioning that each one of us always receives the fullness of grace necessary to be able, in obedience to God, to benefit from the freedom of not sinning and keeping our souls immaculate until God's judgment.

Mary is for every one of us the example of a full correspondence to the grace of God, to such an extent that she can call herself the very Immaculate Conception. This means that she is a constant reminder for us of our destination, to which each of us has been called. And if each of us were obedient to God and did not waste any grace that God generously and abundantly gives us, we would have been like her, like Mary, without sin, because we are inhabited by grace.

Mary's sadness is, then, the sadness of God whose appeals, that man may choose God and His will in a free and sincere way, are ignored, and in fact man's condition is getting worse. This is because we do not go to the source of grace, that is, to Jesus in the Eucharist, but we always prefer water from the cracked tanks of our own efforts and desires.

The Face of Our Lady is that of a representative of the Family of God, to whom each of us is invited as brother and sister in Jesus. Despite this great honour, which we all received by a personal decision of God, we do not act like members of the Divine Family, but like black sheep we reject heavenly nobility and dignity by living far away from God.

Flavio Gilio, MS
Eusébio Kangupe, MS
Karol Porczak, MS