

## Putting God in a Square Box

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We all have our idea of who God is, and how God does things. Most of these are coming from our education and how God has been taught to us. However, what do we do if God's ways start to be unconventional from what we are accustomed to from God? What if the unfolding of events does not fit our idea of how God should do things? What do we do if God seems to not be fitting in our square box?

There was a woman that taught me something important about the spiritual life. Her name was Mrs. Teresa Pineda. When I first met her she was in her early 80's. She had trouble walking, and was hard of hearing, but still very active and alive in the service of the Lord. Her greatest joys were attending daily Mass and bringing the pilgrim image of the Blessed Mother, as part of her duties as a member of the Legion of Mary. Of course, praying the Rosary was a source of strength. She had the gift of rallying and organizing people to be able to help those in need. The need could be financial, emotional, or most especially, spiritual.

In 1998, she was diagnosed with cancer. In the same year, one of her sons was also diagnosed with cancer. Then her 18-year-old granddaughter had to be brought to the States for treatment of a very rare disease, which was still being researched. In that same year, her two-year-old grandson was diagnosed with acute leukemia. She received news of all of this in a six-month period.

I visited her just to see how she was doing. I will not forget what she told me, "When God gives blessings, I ask my children to kneel down and give thanks. When God gives trials, I also ask my children to kneel down and ask the Lord for strength. At times, I do not understand, but He is God. I believe that God knows what he is doing." And there she sat on her chair—no anger—no agitation—just the radiance of peace all around her.

In the Gospel today, we hear the people of Nazareth getting extremely angry with Jesus, to the point of throwing Him down the cliff. Why? Because Jesus did not fit their expectations.

First, they had their expectations that Jesus would perform His miracles in Nazareth, as He had done all over Galilee—He did not.

Second, they had their expectation of who the Messiah of the Jewish Nation should be—regal, powerful, rich, marching with a proud army. Jesus was not. He was a simple hometown boy.

Third, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God being opened to the poor, prisoners, sinners, and to all whom the Jewish people considered outcasts of the society. In the people's minds, Jesus was undermining their privileged status and place in the family of God.

Jesus was not fitting into all their conceptions and paradigms. Jesus was not fitting into their square box. This enraged them immensely. "Let us get rid of Him and throw Him down the cliff!" was their response.

In our own life, it is the same. We get upset and even angry when our expectations are not met and when events and people do not fit into our own square box. It is really about control.

We wish to be in control of our lives and of others. Unfortunately, we can also do this with God, as the people of Nazareth did to Jesus. We may unconsciously wish to control God by making God's way fit with our own paradigms of doing things.

In life, we have created a list of "shoulds". This should happen this way—this person should act this way—this plan should go on this way. If we live with "shoulds", peace may be hard to find in our life. We can only find true peace if we can let go of our lists of expectations and "shoulds". Then we need to let things unfold according to God's plans, even if they totally go against our comfortable square box.

Mrs. Pineda said, "At times I do not understand, but He is God, and I believe that He knows what He is doing." Who will understand the rationale behind four members of the same family being diagnosed with life-threatening concerns in six months? However, Mrs. Pineda allowed God's ways to unfold—this was the secret of her peace.

May we not fall into the same blunder of the people of Nazareth, the hometown of Jesus. Had they allowed Jesus to be, then they could have witnessed the unfolding of God's kingdom in their midst! Rather than telling God how it should be, they could have thrown their square box and "shoulds" away, allowing God the space and freedom to perform God's beautiful order of salvation.

Let us pray:

Dear God,

I live in my comfortable square box. But, if you ask me to get out of it, may I trust you so that I may see the unfolding of Your will which may not be in synch with my plans and paradigms of

who you are and how you do things. Only with this grace will I be less angry, less upset with life, with people and with myself. May I be more open to the beauty of who you are and to the wisdom of your will, even if I could not comprehend it in my square box—only then will I find my true peace in you. I ask this in Jesus name—

Amen

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