
Off The Pulpit

January 09, 2014

No Knowing God

Our ideas of God are expressed through metaphors. Since we cannot begin to know what God is, we try to imagine what God is like — a King, a rock, a father, a fortress, a protector. As we expand our images so we expand our conception of God.

When we read in Isaiah, "As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you" (66:13) it presents a different God than the usual imagery. It is the same God, of course, but our minds and souls embrace a larger idea.

When I teach teenagers I often ask the following question: could a two year old imagine what it is like to be a teenager? No, they respond — a two year old cannot even begin to imagine what he or she does not know. Well, the distance between us and God is infinitely greater than between a two year old and a teenager. So the more metaphors, the larger the conception, the more embracing and expansive, the likelier we are to catch the tiniest sliver of that which surpasses all understanding. To know God, said the medieval philosopher Joseph Albo, one would need to be God.

We are not. So let us multiply our metaphors, be humble, and seek what can never be entirely found.