

Entering the Theo Drama

Genesis 12:1–4a

Psalm 33:4–5, 18–20, 22

2 Timothy 1:8b–10

Matthew 17:1–9

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Lent 2017

So, what's the story of your life? Or, perhaps more pointedly, how do you frame the story of your life?

Renowned theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar, once suggested that there are two different dramas we can live out in life: an ego-drama or a theo-drama.

In the Ego-drama, my life is all about me. I am the author of the screen play. I have the lead role; I also produce and direct the show. I am the captain of my own boat, and my fate is in my own hands.

When the storms and challenges of life blow up, I am sometimes surprised that they don't exactly fit with the script I've imagined. There's always my crew to blame, of course, or the "god" of my own making, against whom I can rant. But such intrusive realities ultimately threaten my world view, and nothing is more important than me defending my place in my drama.

In the Theo-drama, on the contrary, others take centre stage. The entire production, in fact, abounds with a depth and a meaningfulness because the story is not dominated by my pride, my self-aggrandizement, my agenda. When properly framed in such a theological perspective, my life is really a matter of playing an essential part in a story that's larger than life itself.

Rather than succumbing to illusions of total control, I navigate my way into the Theo-drama by humbly saying "Yes" to the role for which I was quite literally born. I embrace the fact the "my boat" is not really mine, but is on loan for a few scenes. I open my eyes to the fact that the Captain is always on board, and all is well, even though I cannot foresee the resolution of the final scene.

When framed as an Ego-drama, my life is the centre of the story and I become exhausted. I wear myself out seeking to fill myself up. I have to have all the answers, all the time. I find myself shocked when deep-rooted fears or anxieties well up to ruin my day.

When framed in terms of the Theo-drama, my life becomes a matter of making a gift of myself to others. I'm open to mystery, to wonder and to awe. I find myself fulfilled by pouring myself into the role which the divine Director asks of me each day. I'm confident that the Captain will quiet the winds and the sea, and so I am quietly trusting about the story's ultimate ending.

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI contrasted the ego and theo dramas succinctly when he once wrote:

*...love means that we allow ourselves to be parted
from that narrow view directed toward our own ego
and that we begin to move out from our own self,
in order to be there for others. "¹*

Moving out from our own self in order to be there for others is the theme at the heart of today's readings. They present to us profound insights as to how to live in the Theo Drama that is a great story; has Jesus as the protagonist; and invites us into those scenes that is our life on earth.

Let's look at each of these insights are presented to us by Genesis, Matthew and Paul.

1. The Theo Drama is a Great Story

The reading from Genesis is a remarkable condensation of the Story of the Bible. In order to understand it though we need to turn to another Old Testament reading, Joshua 24. In this passage, Joshua is recounting how God had led his people from the time of Abraham. Listen to what he says about Abraham.

*'Your fathers lived of old beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods. 3 Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan, and made his offspring many.'*²

Terah was the father of Abraham. We read that he served other gods. In other words, he was living his life according to the ego drama. God took Abraham from his native ego drama and drew him into the great story of the theo drama. This is a story clearly outlined in the reading from Genesis 12. These are the Lord's first words to Abram.

*"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."*³

Do you hear the direction the Lord gives to Abram? Leave the limited ego drama, referred to here as "your kindred and your father's house", to the Land where God is the writer and director. Notice how central God is to this story. "I will show you; I will make of you a great nation; I will bless you; I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you."

When we allow God to draw us into his story it makes all the difference to how we live our lives. No longer is everything dependent and me. There is another "I" who calls you and me by name in our baptism and confirmation. As we respond to his invitation we discover that the unfolding

¹ <http://everydayevangelization.blogspot.ca/2015/08/ego-drama-or-theo-drama.html>

² The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Jos 24:2-3). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

³ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Ge 12:1-3). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

story of our lives centres on another. The “I” of Genesis” becomes even more personal as we pick up the theo drama in Matthew 17. For here the “I” has a name, and it is Jesus.

2. The Protagonist of the Theo Drama:

Every story has a main character, called the Protagonist. Matthew shows us clearly who the main character is in the theo drama. It is Jesus. At the beginning of the story we are told that Jesus is talking with Moses and Elijah. Why with these two Old Testament characters? It is because they represent the story that is the first part of the Bible. Moses, as the great Law Giver, and Elijah, the first of the great prophets. There are repeated references to the Old Testament as the “Law and the Prophets” here defined by Moses and Elijah. Matthew wants us to understand that everything in the first part of the story is moving somewhere and to someone. That somewhere is the transfiguration and the crucifixion. The someone is the main character of the theo drama, Jesus Christ. That Jesus is the focus is stated clearly when Matthew writes at the end of the passage:

And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.⁴

Not only did they see only Jesus but they were told by the Father “Listen to him”. But why to Jesus? Because his is the beloved Son, the one in whom, and with whom, the Father is well pleased. This is a pleasure expressed in this Transfiguration scene and one that will find its completion on the Cross.

Consider this parallel. The Transfiguration is a private revealing to Peter, James and John where an exalted Jesus, with garments glistening, stands on a high mountain and is flanked by two religious giants from the past. All is light. The Cross is a public spectacle, a humiliated Jesus, whose clothes have been torn from him and divided, is lifted upon a cross and flanked by two common, convicted criminals. All is darkness.⁵

In a most subtle way the Transfiguration anticipates the Crucifixion helping us to realize the central place Jesus plays in the Theo Drama.

Because of who Jesus is, St John Paul II wrote:

“The Church does not cease to listen to his words. She rereads them continually. With the greatest devotion she reconstructs every detail of his life. The Church never ceases to relive his death on the Cross and his resurrection, which constitute the content of the Church’s daily life. The Church lives his mystery, draws unwearingly from it and continually seeks ways of bringing this mystery of her Master and Lord to humanity—to the peoples, the nations, the succeeding generations, and every individual human being”⁶

⁴ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, Mt 17:8). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁵ Mitch, C., & Sri, E. (2010). The Gospel of Matthew (p. 218). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.

⁶ Saint Matthew’s Gospel. (2005). (p. 123). Dublin; New York: Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishers.

This is why we need the Church. It is through the Church and our participation in her life that we can be obedient to the Father's voice and so listen to Jesus.

Which brings me to our third insight.

3. We are invited into the Theo Drama:

St Paul issued this invitation to Timothy with the utmost clarity:

Do not be ashamed then of testifying to our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but take your share of suffering for the gospel in the power of God⁷

We are to take our share in this story, one that will require suffering, but one that will also help us to know the power of God.

We will know suffering because there is an inherent resistance to accept that our lives are not an ego drama but a theo drama. There are many who do not want to name Jesus. They insist that their life is about them and they are the captain of their own boat. When people name Jesus, they can in extreme situations, as the martyrs experienced, be required to die for the theo drama

However, when we allow ourselves to see what Abram saw, when we allow ourselves to discover that the transfigured Jesus is the Jesus of Calvary, then we discover the power of God. With David in today's psalm we can sing:

*Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,⁸*

In your baptism and confirmation, you like Abram were called into this great Theo Drama described by Benedict XVI as the story of love. Remember what he said:

*...love means that we allow ourselves to be parted
from that narrow view directed toward our own ego
and that we begin to move out from our own self,
in order to be there for others."*

So, let me ask you. Are you living ever more fully in the Theo Drama or are you still choosing the narrow and limited story of your own ego drama?

⁷ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, 2 Ti 1:8). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

⁸ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition. (1993). (Ps 33:18). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.