

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 2023

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.

Pope 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

Do year 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 so that you will be a blessing"

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. As we respond to his invitation we discover that the unfolding 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

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.

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

Now think about this verse in relation to the Mass. As we reach the climax of the Liturgy, the Eucharistic Lord is elevated with the Precious Blood in the Chalice and we see only Jesus alone. At every mass the Protagonist of the Theo Drama is front and centre and we see Jesus alone. At every Mass we see re-presented the story of the Transfiguration.

Not only did they see only Jesus but they were told by the Father “Listen to him”. This is something else we do at every Mass as the Scriptures are read and explained in the Liturgy of the Word.

In every Mass the Theo Drama is writ large.

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 God⁵

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, that we are invited into this great story when we allow ourselves to discover that the transfigured Jesus is the protagonist in the theo drama then we discover the power of God at work in our lives. With David in today’s psalm we can sing:

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

⁵ The Holy Bible. (2006). (Revised Standard Version; Second Catholic Edition, 2 Ti 1:8). San Francisco: Ignatius Press.

*Truly the eye of the LORD is on those who fear him,
on those who hope in his steadfast love,⁶*

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

So, let us together this Lent enter more fully into the great story – let us enter into the Theo Drama.

⁶ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition. (1993). (Ps 33:18). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.