

Like Oxygen...

For new years' eve, I had the opportunity to attend the CCO Rise Up Banquet. CCO is a movement designed to equip and empower leaders for the new evangelization particularly on university campuses. Every year they have their national conference in a different city whether it is in Ottawa or Vancouver and next year it will be in Toronto.

Imagine St. Mary's Cathedral completely filled with 850 young adults singing their hearts out at mass! It is amazing to see so many young adults transformed by this event. Miss Rodeo Canada was there and she was someone I knew from the CCO community and now she is sharing the faith in that territory. I talked to some other students and some of them are thinking of joining the priesthood, others went for the first time and now they want to go to the next rise up event or go on a mission trip.

The one thing that stuck out for me during the program for the banquet was the scholarships that were given out to the two students and they quoted the application of one student. Speaking about his experience of missionary work on campus he said, "Being missionary is like oxygen for me. It gives me life like nothing else, and it gives me a sense of deep fulfillment and joy."

This student so identified himself with the missionary calling that it was life itself for him. This is the central point for us that John the Baptist points out today because in order for us to have a missionary identity, we need to know our identity in Christ; in order to make him known to others we need to be known by him.

When the pharisees come to talk to John they ask him a very simple question: Who are you? If we ask ourselves that question we would naturally respond with our name, but if we were pressed further, 'who are you really?' how would we identify ourselves? We might respond and identify ourselves with our occupations, our skills, our gifts (I'm a student, an engineer, an artist).

Similarly, the priests and Levites ask John to identify himself in the same way: who are you? What title are you? Are you the messiah, Elijah, the prophet? But notice how he responds: "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord' ...among you stands one whom you do not know.' Knowing is a critical theme in John. In the prologue, we hear that 'he was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.' The Creator of the world is not known by his creatures; the Almighty One who knows all things came to a people who knew him not.

What does it mean to know God? Or rather what does it mean to be known by him?

When I was on my 30 day retreat, I read an article which has totally changed my perspective on prayer. The title of this article is called 'Looking at God, looking at you.' Prayer is not just about gaining more discrete facts and ideas ABOUT God. That is good to do and that is more known as study. Prayer is a relationship, it is about looking at God seeing him face to face.

Yet it is much deeper than that—prayer is about looking at the WAY He looks at me. Is he looking at me with disappointment, or anger or fear? Or is he looking at me like the Father he truly is, building me up, raising me up, seeing my sins, yes, but seeing so much more in me, seeing the destiny and the great plan he has in store for me. Is that how he sees you? Is that how you know him? Is that how you are known by him?

When we experience a profound and lasting love like that, when we experience a God who IS Love, then we see our unworthiness, we see that we are even unworthy to do the work of a slave and untie his sandals. Yet God calls each of us to receive this love and share it with others, to be the voice crying out in the wilderness preparing the way for the Lord because we will realize that the intensity of his personal love with which God looks at me is also the same way he looks at others and so he calls me to be missionary. Then I will be a channel of that love that gives me life, and this missionary way of living will be my life, my oxygen.