



A few months ago I was visiting a town west of Mexico City called Valle de Bravo and had the chance to stop into a little carmelite monastery and retreat house called Maranatha.

Despite the numerous visitors, the beauty of the place and its tasteful art and architecture inspired in me a thirst for prayer. To my delight, in one of the more silent precincts behind a fountain evoking the deer of Psalm 42, I found an adoration chapel. **The curious thing was that the monastery rule requires all visitors to remove their shoes before entering. “Take the sandals off your feet.” My thoughts turned immediately to Moses.**

Exodus chapter three narrates the bedouin shepherd Moses’ eerie encounter with a burning bush. Intrigued by the shrub’s resistance to the flames that burned but did not consume, he steps aside from the path to investigate the phenomenon. Then he hears a voice.

“Take the sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” The order from the Presence in the bush effects immediate compliance. There is something far more here than meets the eye. Moses realizes he is before the Angel of the Lord. **He enters the sacred space and begins to converse with God.**

Encountering God requires purification; hence the symbol of taking off your shoes. At first glance leaving behind the profane is a condition for entering the sacred place. But **we easily apply categories of “sacred” and “profane” too hastily. The word “sacred” comes from the Latin sancire, to set apart or separate for a holy purpose. But what is it that separates sacred from profane? Where lies the dividing line?**

If we look to the saints for guidance, we may be surprised at what they have to teach us. St Francis of Assisi saw God in all creation. St Therese of Lisieux insisted on making simple chores into worship. Jesus himself saw something of God the Father in the lilies of the field or something as banal as a woman losing a coin. **They teach us that God is indeed the Creator who continually holds all things in existence. We begin to**

realize that the sacred--that which has a holy purpose--is more than just what you find in a church.

I would venture to say the sacred is where we begin to think like God. The dividing line lies not at the threshold of a building, but where we separate from the world's way of thinking and seeing. To take the sandals from our feet is to walk barefoot on the raw truth of what is--and it all bespeaks the Creator.

To remove the sandals from our feet is to remove the calluses from our hearts, renew the marvel and wonder at what is, and allow contemplation to enkindle our hearts.

It is then that God reveals who he is: ***"I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." He knows me and I know him. "And Moses hid his face."***