

JUNE 29 2025, FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Encounters with God: Trust, Suffering, and the Yes of Faith

We were at the mall, under an awning, and it was pouring—cats and dogs. As we stood there, mesmerized by the rain, I was next to a six-year-old girl who said to her mother, “Mum, let’s run through the rain!”

Her mother replied, “But honey, we’ll all get wet.”

The child responded, “No. We won’t get wet. That’s not what you said this morning.”

Her mother looked puzzled.

“This morning when we talked about Daddy and his cancer,” the girl continued, “you said, ‘If God will get us through this, God will get us through anything.’”

At that moment, there was total silence. Only the sound of the raindrops remained. It was a holy pause—an opportunity for encounter. The mother could have ignored the child, laughed it off, or dismissed her.

But it was a moment when this child expressed trust in a God she believed in. What would the lesson be? Would her faith be nourished or crushed? Nurtured or dismissed?

And the mother said, “You are right, honey. Let’s go. God will take care of us. And if we get wet, perhaps we all need a washing.”

They put something over their heads, and they ran through the rain. Others from our group joined in, giggling and laughing. I ran too—and I got thoroughly wet.

I needed a washing.

God encounters us in many ways. Today, we remember two towering figures of the Church—St. Peter and St. Paul—who encountered God, and whose responses offer us a model for how we, too, can respond.

In our Gospel today, Peter acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God. But this was not the first time he encountered Him. After a long, empty night of fishing, Jesus told Peter to lower his nets. The result was an overwhelming catch of fish. Peter realized then: truly, this is the Son of God. When Jesus called, “Come follow me,” Peter left everything. It was a moment of encounter.

Then came another encounter—during Holy Week, at the house of Caiaphas. When someone said, “This man, Peter, knows Jesus,” Peter denied Him three times. “I do not know the man.” Jesus looked at him. Peter encountered Jesus—and chose to deny Him.

But the story doesn’t end there.

After the Resurrection, on the shores of Galilee, Jesus fed His disciples breakfast. There was a healing moment between Jesus and Peter. Jesus asked three times, “Do you love me?” And Peter answered, “I love you, Lord. I love you, Lord.” Jesus reinstated him: “On this rock I will build my Church.” He entrusted Peter with care of the faithful and with the sacraments—means by which we too encounter Christ.

Peter met Jesus—just as you and I meet Him. Paul also encountered Christ. In the Old Testament, Moses asked to see God face to face, but was told that to do so would be fatal. Paul, on the road to Damascus, did encounter Christ—not physically, for he was blinded—but internally. And his answer was yes.

Paul writes, “I have been embedded in Christ through my sufferings.” In his letters, especially in First Corinthians, Paul lists the sufferings he endured—beatings, prison, shipwreck—not to boast, but to witness that after encountering Jesus, he gave a complete, unwavering yes.

You and I are on a journey. At various points, God encounters us. How do we respond?

I remember clearly, February 23, 1970. I was on the island of Wakenaam in the Essequibo River. It was early morning—the Day of the Republic of Guyana. The country had just become a republic, and I felt joy in my heart. Then, out of the blue, the sun rose, and I thought, “Truly, God loves this country. God loves us.”

But not all encounters come through beauty. More often, we encounter God in pain and suffering. A child dies. A marriage breaks up. We’re fired from our job. We’re told we have Stage Four cancer. And we cry out, “What is God trying to tell me in all this?”

If I were not a person of faith—if I didn’t believe in the afterlife—then perhaps medical assistance in dying might seem logical. But we do believe. And we know that God encounters us to remind us: something even more beautiful lies ahead.

St. Peter and St. Paul—pray for us. Give us your courage as we encounter God.

God bless you all.