

Presence of God

Opening Prayer:

Lord You search me and you know me; you know my resting and my rising, you discern my purpose from afar. Psalm 139

In the Wizard of Oz, the Lion, the Scarecrow, the Tin man and Dorothy were all looking/searching for something they believed they did not have. After their long journey they learned that what they were searching for was already in them. In the end the Scarecrow asks Dorothy what did she learn and she responds:

Dorothy: Well, I—I think that it, that it wasn't enough just to want to see Uncle Henry and Auntie Em — and it's that — if I ever go looking for my heart's desire again, I won't look any further than my own backyard. Because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with! Is that right?

Glinda: That's all it is!

What a great realization... *I never really lost it... That's all it is!* This sums up what God's presence is all about. God is always with us, in us, around us, yet I am afraid we do gymnastics to try to find God in other places except in ourselves and in our own reality. Anthony de Mello shared this story in one of his books: *The small fish asks the Whale, "Excuse me sir...where is this thing called the ocean? The whale responds, the ocean is the thing you are in this very moment. The small fish, disappointed, swam away.* It is said that God is closer to ourselves than we are. While we may accept this intellectually, in reality we forget. During our difficult or dark moments we might be inclined to believe we have been abandoned by God, and like the little fish we swim away, yet the opposite is true. Like Jesus on the Cross we may cry out to God, "why have you abandoned me..." the reality is that God never did abandon Jesus and God never abandons us. The proof that God is always with us can be found in our surroundings, our friends, and the people we share with. Those who walk with us in good times and in bad simply put in the ordinariness of life. Ron Rolheiser shares the following:

Some years ago I attended a symposium on religious experience. A variety of speakers made presentations on how they tried to experience God. One woman, a professor of religious studies, shared how she spent nearly three hours each day meditating, using a strict method for centering prayer. She went on to say that, during those periods of prayer, she sometimes felt God's presence quite intensely.

During the question period, I asked her this: "How would you compare the feelings you have when you meditate privately in this way to the feelings you have when you are at the dinner-table with family or friends?" Her response: "There's no comparison, not in terms of religious experience. At table, I sometimes have nice, secular experiences, but in prayer I really meet God!"

I'm both pagan and Christian enough to have reservations about that answer, not because I doubt the power or importance of private prayer, we could all use more of it, but because of what such an answer says about God and our experience of God. What's at issue here?

Someone, I think it was Buckminster Fuller, once said: "God is a verb not a noun." At one level, that statement is dangerously false. At another, however, it affirms something very important and Christian about our relationship to God, namely, that God is not, first of all, a formula, a dogma, a creedal statement, or a metaphysics that demands our assent. God is a flow of living relationships, a trinity, a family of life that we can enter, taste, breathe within, and let flow through us.

"God is love," scripture says, "and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him or her." God is community, family, parish, friendship, hospitality and whoever abides in these abides in God and God abides in him or her."

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God is community, family, parish, friendship, hospitality and whoever abides in these abides in God and God abides in him or her." God is a trinity, a flow of relationships among persons. If this is true, and scripture assures us that it is, then the realities of dealing with each other in community, at the dinner-table, over a bottle of wine or an argument, not to mention the simple giving and receiving of hospitality are not a pure, secular experiences but the stuff of church, the place where the life of God flows through us. We live inside of God. Scripture assures us that we abide in God whenever we stay inside of family, community, parish, friendship, hospitality – and, yes, even when we fall in love.

The following quotes are from various authors. Take a few minutes to read and reflect.

*When Moses says, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" God answers not by telling Moses who he is, but by telling him who God is, saying, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12)" -Harold S. Kushner, **Overcoming Life's Disappointments***

*"There is a beautiful moment in the bible when the prophet Elijah feels God's presence. The Scriptures say that a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart, but God was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. It was the whisper of God. Today we can hear the whisper where we least expect it; in a baby refugee and in a homeless rabbi, in crack addicts and displaced children, in a groaning creation." -Shane Claiborne, **The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical***

God, Who is everywhere, never leaves us. Yet He seems sometimes to be present, sometimes to be absent. If we do not know Him well, we do not realize that He may be more present to us when He is absent than when He is present."

*-Thomas Merton, **No Man Is an Island***

Presence of Jesus

"You are the Salt of the earth. If that Salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden." Mt. 5:13-14

We are reminded in the Gospels that the greatest commandment is to love God with our whole being and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus tells us that there is no greater commandment. Our relationship with God by extension must affect those we come in contact with. As we all know its not only important to deepen our relationship with God it is just as important to share that love, fruit of the relationship with God, with those we come in contact especially the poor, needy, the most abandoned spiritually and physically. There is a story of an American Soldier during World War II who walks into a Catholic church that was basically in rubble. There he sees a huge statue of Christ with no hands. He offers the pastor to take the statue back the States to have it repaired. The pastor thanks him for the offer but declines. He explains to the soldier that he wants to keep the statue as is and hang it in the sanctuary once it is fixed. The soldier asks the pastor the logic behind such a decision. He responds to the soldier by saying that he wants to remind his parishioners that they are the hands of Christ. That they are the ones entrusted to build the Kingdom of God, right here right now. I find this to be quite a simple and power

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story about the presence of Christ in the baptized and the responsibility we all have to continue building the Kingdom of God in our midst especially in areas where there is hatred, war, poverty, illness and death. Each disciple of Christ is indeed the salt of the earth, invigorating people's lives and the light of the world, shining it in dark areas of the lives of our brothers and sisters and in society as a whole.

Closing Exercises: The following exercises are taken from Anthony de Mello's Sadhana A Way to God, Christian Exercises in Eastern Form

Finding God in All Things:

-Sit comfortably in a chair. Become aware of your breathing

Slowly focus your attention on your body.*become aware of your sensations, feelings, do not give these sensations any names (burning, numbness, pricking, itching cold) just feel the sensations without putting a label on them... Do the same with sounds...capture as many of them as possible...Listen without putting a label on them... As you proceed with this exercise you will notice a great peacefulness coming upon you, a deep silence...become aware of the silence and peacefulness. Feel how good it is to be here now. To have nothing to do..to just be. Be.

Awareness of the Other

In this exercise de Mello invites his readers to think of awareness on a broader level. He invites us to become aware not only of our fellow brothers and sisters, living things but also of all inanimate objects. He points out: *"Some of the great mystics tell us that when they reach the stage of illumination they become mysteriously filled with a sense of deep reverence. Reverence for God, reverence for life in all its forms, reverence for inanimate creation too....they no longer treat persons as things...things as things...as a result...their respect and love for persons becomes heightened."*

-Choose an object-a pen, a cup, a rock, something that you can hold in your hands. Let the object rest on your palms or hands outstretched. Close your eyes and get a feel of the object. Become fully aware of its weight, and then of the sensation it produces in your palms. Explore it with your fingers...do this gently and reverently. Explore its smoothness, its roughness, its hardness, its warmth or coldness...now touch it to other parts of your body and see if it feels different...touch it to your lips...your cheeks...your forehead...the back of your hand...Now open your eyes and be aware of it through your sense of sight. Look at it from different angles...see every possible detail in it..its colors, its form, its various parts...smell it...and taste it if possible...Now place the object in front of you or on your lap and speak to it...ask it questions about itself. Its life, its origins, its future.. and listen while it unfolds to you its secret of its being and of its destiny.

-The object has some hidden wisdom to reveal to you about yourself...ask and listen.... Now place yourself and this object in the presence of Jesus, the Word of God, in whom and for whom everything was made. Listen to what he has to say to you and to the object...what do the two of you say in response? Look at the object once more...has your attitude toward it changed? Is there any change in your attitude toward you and the objects around you?

Share your experience with others...