

Remembering God's Presence In My History

(Adapted from the work of John English, S.J.)

(Seeing where you have met God in your past history may help you as you reflect on how you hope to meet God in your future.)

We know by faith that we can find God present in all things. Our creator is present in all the events and dimensions of my life. But has the awareness of this presence throughout my life really taken hold of me? This exercise is a help to discover the presence of our Triune God in the events of my own life, past and present. Memory is the sacrament of God's presence.

The material over which I shall pray is the story of my own personal history -- the events, the experiences, the people who have crossed my path, the jobs I have held, the gifts I have been given, my accomplishments, my failures. After placing myself in the presence of God, I go down memory lane and ponder contemplatively the events of my own personal history.

I seek how the Divine Shepherd has been involved in my life.

As you settle into prayer ask for the gift of a deep felt appreciation of how my Creator God has been present in my history.

First

I begin by remembering. This remembering is an awareness of the exterior events in my life and my interior reactions to them. My memory makes them present to me. I remember those that give meaning to me (both pleasure and pain) or those I still can't find meaning for but that I am still searching out. Some key experiences that have been traumatic may remain hidden, but I will be aware of something because of other events recalled. Let one memory touch another by association. This may be neither logical nor chronological.

The following headings may help to begin this process of remembering:

guardians friends school baptism
first communion health incidents of childhood grandparents
relatives male-female companionship experiences of church struggles
talents five senses helping others positions I have held

I come from others, from a familial network of some kind, where I became who I am. My guardians, aunts, father, uncles, mother, brothers and sisters shaped me to what I am. The great majority of my opinions, of my likes and dislikes, of my values and appreciations have been stamped

by them. This "familial" touch reaches deep into my subconscious: my prejudices, my prior judgments, my behaviour, my tastes, my logic are moulded by the community I come from.

(adapted from Van Breeman: Called by Name)

As I remember all these events and items in my life history I try to notice the gifts that I have received. "Name something you have that you have not received" (1Cor 4:7). "Naked I came forth from my mother's womb, and naked shall I go back again. God gave and God has taken away, blessed be God's Holy Name" (Job 1:21).

Second

After I have been in touch with the many ways in which I have been gifted I now begin to notice HOW God has been present in my life. I can approach this by recalling first those peak experiences where I have felt profoundly God's presence or those very empty experiences where I have perceived God's absence. Both the "positive" and the "negative" awareness of God can be indicators of God's presence in my life. Then I can begin to investigate the more subtle ways God has been present.

Although it may help to list these moments, it is very important to spend time just remembering and savoring each of these moments to receive a deep-felt appreciation of them. "If I go up to the heavens you are there, if I sink to the nether world, you are present there" (Ps 139:8).

Third

Now once again look over your experiences right until now. This time, try to discover where in your life you experienced God in the ways revealed through some of the following images and names:

Light ... Truth ... Mother ... Father ... Friend ... Lover ... The Holy One.

Judge ... Creator ... The Faithful One ... My Rock My Husband

Mercy ... Great Spirit ... Hidden One ... Nameless One ... Caring One

Fourth

After I have been in touch with such moments I can once again "remember" but this time with a different perspective. This time I shall attempt to notice how God has been with me constantly in a much more dynamic way -- not only in isolated or separated moments of time but continuously as companion, as friend, as lover, as guide - not as observer but as participant. My own personal history indeed has been a salvation history. "When you pass through the water, I will be with you; in the rivers, you shall not drown. When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned. The flames will not consume you. For I am your God, the Holy One of Israel, your saviour" (Is 43:2-3).

Fifth

Before this point I have spent time growing in the awareness of God continuously present in my life. Now I move to this fifth point which may be more difficult to get hold of. Enlightenment on this point may come at a much later date. It concerns the way or pattern in which God interfaces with me. As a unique person with a unique history, I am loved by God in a unique way. God, always the Faithful One, encounters me according to my own personality, gifts, character.

I can begin this investigation of remembering by trying to get hold of the various rhythms of my life, for example,

- * the cycles of success and failure;
- * lean years (months) rich years (months);
- * periods of being alone and periods of being with others;
- * periods of fogginess and periods of seeing clearly;
- * periods of fatigue and periods of energy;
- * cycles of work and cycles of leisure;
- * patterns of joy - suffering - fear - courage - desire - generosity.

Does God seem to be dealing with me according to some recognizable pattern?

Have there been any recognizable calls in my life?

Has there been a similarity about each of these calls?

"The days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...." (Jer 31:31). The people of Israel could interpret what was going on in the events that affected them because they experienced the pattern of covenant. This was God's way of dealing uniquely with them. This same pattern of covenant gave them a touchstone for recognizing the leading of God's Spirit. This dynamic pattern could give them the right to hope and expect such an approach from God in the future.

The patterns by which God encounters me can be a help to recognize God's presence, a touchstone to discern authentic consolation and the peace of Christ in my life.

Dialogue with God

From time to time throughout this exercise I shall express my feelings and thoughts to God. I can use those names and images of God that harmonize with the ways God is continually present to me.