

Finding the Presence of mind

Several years ago I was assigned a story by a newspaper, and the person I needed to interview lived about an hour's drive north of my office. About five minutes into the trip the car radio went out. I flipped through different channels, hoping I had just lost connection with that particular one, but I didn't get anything. Not even static.

Keep in mind, I love listening to news programs when the topic is something I wonder about. I like listening to the blues and to jazz. No radio or CD player on a one-hour trip? And the iPod and smart phone hadn't been invented yet? I couldn't stand the thought. It seemed like a cruel, cosmic joke.

For most of the miles I fumed. Part of the fun of driving that far away was that I had the time to listen to something worthwhile. When that was taken away from me, I was lost.

But an interesting thing happened on my way home that day. I got used to the silence. I started thinking about people I hadn't thought of in a long time. I started praying for them. I thought about things that had been bugging me lately, and I sensed God's desire to purify them. I let the Presence overtake them.

Something else happened. The story I had gone to cover was a confusing one. As I was interviewing the people I needed for the story, I knew I would have a difficult time coming up with an interesting way to tell it. That, too, fell into place in my mind as I drove in the silence.

Getting started on the story didn't take the stimulants I usually needed, which involved a heavily caffeinated beverage and fear of a never-satisfied editor. Both were historically part of what jump-started me into productivity. In the silence, the story came together as if it were a giant jigsaw puzzle being assembled in my mind by an outside hand.

"There are no limits to what the Creator can do with those creatures who are ready to stop, be still and silent, to empty themselves, to cease their hurry," said theologian Donald Nicholl.

When I got home that night I told my wife about the radio. She offered to go with me to get it fixed that night, because she knew how dependent I was on it. I told her that we could wait awhile. For the next several weeks she kept asking when I was going to get it fixed. I never did fix that radio. I had something

better.

Thomas Keating said, "This Presence is immense, yet so humble; awe-inspiring, yet so gentle; limitless, yet so intimate, tender and personal. I know that I am known.... It is like coming home to a place I should have never left.... A Door opens within me, but from the other side.... It is both emptiness and fullness at once."

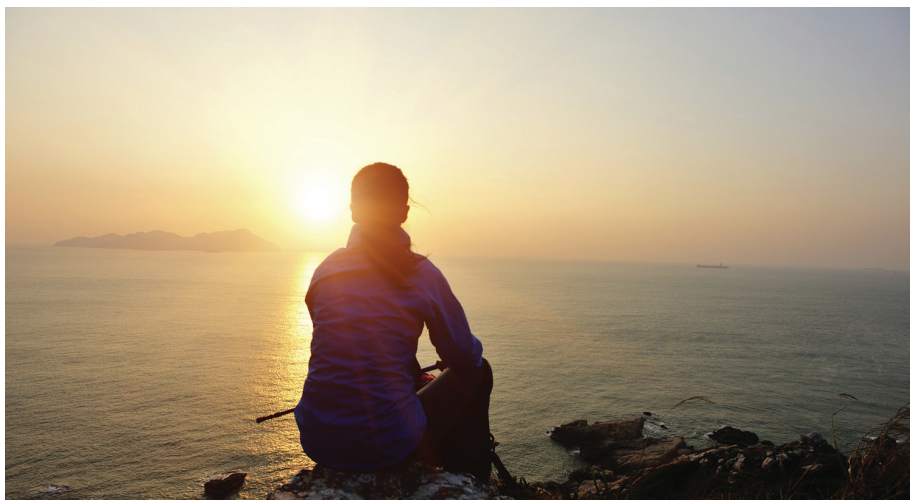
The door that opens from the inside is the door we approach when we want to experience more than just the shallow, hurried, frustrating, unfulfilling life, when we want to intensify the awareness of the Presence of God.

It is a Presence that has been there all along.

"We cannot attain the presence of God," Richard Rohr, an ecumenical teacher and author, said. "We're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness."

The deep people I know are those who have found a way to tune out all of the noise in their lives for a period of time. They disengage from all of the distractions, and then re-engage in a purer, more compassionate manner. They are not dependent on their senses and outside stimulation for their knowledge of the sacred and holy. Crisis does not throw them. It deepens them.

Jesus did this, even in the crush of hungry, hurting, fearful people in need of a healing touch. And he did it in the Garden. And on the Cross. He heard the Silence and recognized its Voice.



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