

WORSHIP 18th OCTOBER 2020

Today we are going to be looking at the Presence of God in our lives.

OPENING PRAYER

St. Ignatius calls us all to the presence of God through his gratitude-packed Contemplation on Divine Love:

I will ponder with great affection how much God our Lord has done for me, and how much He has given me of what He possesses...how God dwells in creatures: in the elements giving them existence, in the plants giving them life, in the animals conferring upon them sensation...how God works and labours for me in all creatures upon the face of the earth, that is, He conducts Himself as one who labours. Thus, in the heavens, the elements, the plants, the fruits, the cattle, all peoples, He gives being, conserves them, confers life and sensation...This is to consider all blessings and gifts as descending from above. Amen

HYMN: HOLY OVERSHADOWING (GRAHAM KENDRICK)

O spread Your wings of mercy over me
And guard my heart with true humility
No shadow of the darkness pressing in
Only the holy overshadowing
Underneath Your wings, overshadowing

No refuge will I seek but God alone
No hiding place save only at Your throne
Only the cross, the blood to wash my sin
Only the holy overshadowing
Underneath Your wings, overshadowing

You are my shield, and my glory
You are the lifter of my head
And though the storms may rage around me
I'll be safe within
Beneath the holy overshadowing

No burden on my back too hard to bear
Only the easy load You bid me wear
Until these troubles pass, my heart will sing
Praise for the holy overshadowing
Underneath Your wings, overshadowing

You are my shield, and my glory
You are the lifter of my head
And though the storms may rage around me
I'll be safe within
Beneath the holy overshadowing

You are my shield, and my glory
You are the lifter of my head
And though the storms may rage around me
I'll be safe within

Beneath the holy overshadowing

Underneath Your wings
Overshadowing, overshadowing

Source: Musixmatch

Songwriters:

Holy Overshadowing lyrics ©

READINGS: PAULA ROGERS

Exodus 33:12-23 NIV

Moses and the Glory of the Lord

Moses said to the Lord, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favour with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favour with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

The Lord replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name."

Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live." Then the Lord said, "There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians' Faith.

We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction.

You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so, you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

REFLECTION

We are all aware how peoples all over the world are deeply affected by the presence of this invisible virus that has become so threatening to our livelihoods and indeed our very lives. It dominates our news, thoughts, actions and creates a great deal of anxiety. Indeed, you could say we fear this invisible presence.

It suddenly struck me that we are also deeply affected by the invisible presence of God, although a lot of the time we take no notice of this phenomenon, and many in this world give little respect or thought to the idea of the presence of an almighty God – perhaps because as 21c people we have no “fear” of God.

I place “fear” in parenthesis because in our 21c fear is associated with things like the corona virus, horror and acts of violence, but in the Bible it refers more to the idea of a sense of respect, awe and submission to our God.

Now Moses knew how important it was to have God's presence with him and the people of Israel. Moses states, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?”

This statement is still as relevant to us today as it was to the people of Israel all those years ago.

Richard Rohr, a Franciscan Priest says “We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness. Little do we realise that God's love is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take. As we take another, it means that God is choosing us now and now and now”. (Loving -the presence-in-the present 2015-12-29)

To become aware of the presence of God we must spend time with God.

Note that Moses then asks for God to show his glory, which can translate as goodness. He is not asking for a theological code of ethics, but for an empowering force, that equips us to live as God's people. He is asking for a gift so that we will be distinguished from other peoples of the world. A gift, not earned by good behaviour, coming to Church, doing good works, but a Gift of empowerment, to do His will, be His presence in this world. Then my friends, things begin to happen.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians Paul commends the church for their, "work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ".

I would say similar things to St John's, so much good work is done. All the work done by those working together to re-open the building, the stewards who ensure we are safe, Tim and the ECC and PCC ensuring good governance, Irene faithfully sending out all the emails, worship material, booking places, the work of Julie, Steve, Paula behind the scenes. Sue for faithfully cleaning, our musicians and singers, Lois and the prayer group, John praying faithfully, the pastoral care lovingly overseen by Ruth. Hannah's faithfulness to the children's work. David for his work on the website. Those of you who keep in touch with one another, and John Gardener ever reaching out to the community of Kingston Park in creative and imaginative ways. Adele and Tim and other worship leaders and those who have so lovingly prepared the vicarage and its garden so that I may have a lovely home. There will be others who I have probably missed out because there is so much good work going on and my access is having to be so virtual at the moment, so please forgive me if I have missed you out, but God knows who you are.

But there is more my friends. Paul says, "For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction."

A gospel that comes not only with words but with power- a description of something indescribably powerful that happened to a group of people, a movement of the Holy Spirit that powerfully effects and changes people.

All those years ago in and around Thessalonica people saw those who had turned to Jesus be joyful in deep suffering, and recognised this invisible presence amongst them, how they had turned from idols and changed.

You may say, well I have never worshipped idols – but believe me there are plenty of 21c idols, fame, money, on-line Image, designer clothes, to name but a few!

And yes, I have seen deep joy amongst many of you even as the world struggles with fear.

Recently I have been asked by people if faith produces resilience in these difficult times- and I would say YES it does! More and more people are Googling prayer, looking for answers to the despair this pandemic has produced, and believe me the world will watch and see how we as Christians handle all this.

In the 1960's the Jesuit Priest Karl Rahner, said, "If Western Christianity did not rediscover its mystical foundations, we might as well close the doors of the church because we have lost the primary reason for our existence.In the days ahead you will either be a mystic (One who has experienced God for real) or nothing at all.

Do not be afraid of this word Mystic it simply means someone who has moved from a mere belief or belonging system to an actual inner experience.

How prophetic these words are. Many until now have seen Christianity as merely a happy club to which a minority of needy people want to belong. They have not seen Christianity for what it is, a power that changes the world, not just 2,000 years ago but now, here,

today in the 21c. God wants this power released amongst this congregation, "For He has chosen you". It is a power to change the world!

Richard Rohr states that, "without some inner experience of the Divine.....nothing authentically new or life giving happens."

Remember God has chosen you and he wants you to become aware of not just His word but His power. The gift of His power, the Holy Spirit to change both your world and the world!

Don't let us strip the message of Christ from its transformative power. Let us help one another to fan the flames of the Spirit within us so we might continually grow deeper into an inner reality that will make a difference in this world.

One outcome from the virus striking our world is that many have slowed down and when we slow down and take time for reflection, we are being present to God's presence all around us. Perhaps this is one of the reasons that there is a renewal of seeking after the divine in our world.

I want to emphasise that this experiencing God for real is not just for a privileged few super spiritual people it is for all who open their heart to God. If you are now in a panic and think wow, I haven't had a personal experience of God I would suggest that you probably have! Think about those times when "help" came at just the right time, or praying for something and it just "happened" to come right, or a morning walk when you are suddenly struck by the beauty of nature, the joy at the birth of a baby, the peace that can come in the midst of suffering etc., etc. I am sure you get my drift.

What we need to fan the flames of this presence amongst us is awareness. There are lots of ways we can do this. Brother Lawrence a monk in the 1600 wrote a small book called "The Practice of the Presence of God", in which he describes how he simply slowed down and did everything, including the most mundane of tasks like sweeping the floor or washing dishes, mindfully in the present moment, savouring the moment as God's gift.

Our dishwasher has broken down recently and I have to say silly as it sounds hand washing the dishes slowly and peacefully has been a real moment of quiet reflection. On the other hand, I find using the vacuum cleaner is not very relaxing, more a noisy pushing hurry. Maybe next time I Hoover up I will try to be slower and give thanks for electricity!

The use of the examen at the end of the day is another useful tool. Simply it is spending a few moments looking over our day and noticing the things we can thank God for. It may be as simple as noticing the beauty in the way the rain runs down a window or light on a cobweb- obviously I am not using the vacuum cleaner enough!

There are many ways we can practice being fully present to the people and the world around us, even in trying times. I will attach to the written material a couple of ideas for you to explore, including one called savouring the seasons and using the Examen prayer.

So, let's fan the flames of our spiritual life, become people who are increasingly more and more aware of God's presence in every situation, and become a people who receive fully this gift from God to change the world around us! Amen

A MEDITATION – LET US TAKE A MOMENT OF QUIET.

- Sit as upright and comfortably as you can, with both feet on the ground and hands resting on your lap.
- We are going to breath in for five counts, hold our breath for five counts and breath out for five counts. We will do this three times.
- Breath in, 1,2,3,4,5. Hold breath for 1,2,3,4,5. Breath out for 1,2,3,4,5. Repeat twice more.
- How does the air feel as it fills your lungs?
- Now what do your five sense tell you?
- Looking around what do you SEE?
- What sounds can you HEAR?
- What can you SMELL?
- What can you TASTE?
- What do you sense you can TOUCH? This may be the feel of the chair under you or material of your clothing.
- Let us be still and know that I Am God.
- What do you feel as you encounter this moment?
- What gifts are you noticing?
- Linger in this moment.
- Savour the Love that is creating this moment and all that it holds.
- What would you like to say to the One who is breathing life into this moment?

HYMN – BE STILL FOR THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.

Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
Come bow before Him now
With reverence and fear
In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here

Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around
He burns with holy fire
With splendour He is crowned
How awesome is the sight
Our radiant King of light
Be still for the glory of the Lord
Is shining all around

Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place
He comes to cleanse and heal
To minister His grace
No work too hard for Him
In faith receive from Him
Be still for the power of the Lord
Is moving in this place

In Him no sin is found
We stand on holy ground
Be still for the presence of the Lord
The Holy One is here
The Holy One is here

Source: Musixmatch

Songwriters:

Be Still for the Presence of the Lord lyrics ©

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION: LOIS GARDENER

Heavenly Father,

We come to you today, thanking you for your presence with us through your Holy Spirit wherever we are. Help us to develop an awareness of your presence with us in all that we do.

Forgive us for where we fall short of your ways for us.
Teach us and strengthen us to follow your paths.

We ask for your mercy and help for our nation and the nations of the world at this time. Please give those in government the wisdom and strength they need to govern with compassion and justice and make wise decisions in difficult situations.

We pray for people suffering from the effects of war, famine, drought, sickness and persecution, that they might know the light of your presence in dark times.

Help your church live and teach the message of Christ faithfully, through the power of your Holy Spirit, that we and others may know you and your presence with us.

We pray for your comfort and strength for those who are bereaved, those who are under pressure and stress with health, work or financial difficulties, asylum seekers and students who are new to our city and those who seek to support them.

We pray for those in need personally known to us in a moment of quiet...

We ask all these prayers in Jesus name. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

God of grace and peace, we rejoice that you have chosen us, and empowered us by your Spirit. Lead us that we may lead others, guide us, that we may be the people you would have us be. Direct us, that we may do what you would have us do; through Christ the Prince of peace. Amen

THE PEACE & BLESSING

The peace of the All-powerful One be with you. The peace of the Saviour be with you. The peace of the Strengtheners be with you. The peace of the Lord be always with you.

ALL: AND ALSO WITH YOU

THE BLESSING

The Lord shield you and protect you, the Lord look upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord fill you with joy and peace and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you and all whom you love. AMEN

SAVOURING THE SEASON- A MEDITATION

- Choose a favourite place to walk or sit—perhaps a path through the woods, a bench in the park, or a comfortable spot in your home.
- Grab a warm beverage.
- Turn off your phone.
- Shelve your “To Do” list for the moment.
- Using your five senses, take stock of the gifts of the present moment.
- Breathe deeply. How does the air feel filling your lungs?
- Look around you. What catches your eye?
- What do you hear?
- Are there any distinctive scents in this moment?
- How is that cup of coffee or tea?
- What do you feel as you encounter this moment?
- What gifts are you noticing?
- Linger in this moment.
- Savour the Love that is creating this moment and all that it holds.
- What would you like to say to the One who is breathing life into this moment?



Take a moment of quiet and reflection. Spend a full minute (or more if you like) simply breathing and focusing on your breath. Notice the breath go in and go out. Feel your body rise with the in-breath and fall with the out-breath. Really notice this. Perhaps you feel your clothes shift a bit as your body moves. If so, really feel this. Notice the coldness of the air as it goes in. And then the warmth as it goes out. Immerse yourself in this experience of breathing for a minute before you read on.

Quietly retrace your day in your mind's eye. Begin with the moment you awoke this morning, right to this very moment. See the events and the people you came across today. Remember the emotions you felt.

Perhaps tune in to the pressure points of the day—those moments of stress or worry or anger or disappointment. Spend a moment with them. Try to see the learning that came here, too. If you're a praying person, you could ask God to be with you in these pressure-point moments.

Now tune in to the moments of happiness, solution, resolution, joy, mercy, love. Spend a few moments reliving these moments. Don't let yourself off the hook by telling yourself there were none of these moments. Maybe they were few and far between, and maybe they were short, but they happened today sometime. Stretch yourself. Savour them. If you're a praying person, you could thank God for these life-giving moments.

Return to your breath again. Feel it go in and go out. As you settle on your breath, I invite you to say a short prayer.

Reflection Questions

- Do you notice anything significant about your day as you look over it? What is it?
- Which difficult moments does this pause of reflection help you understand?
- Do you have any clarity about what you might do tomorrow? If so, what is it?

Excerpt from *Finding God in the Mess* by Brendan McManus, SJ, and Jim Deeds, published by Loyola Press