

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

The purpose of this article is to consider the manifold presence of God in its relation to ourselves. While we believe in the Divine Presence, we are not often enough conscious of the fact of God with us. A consciousness of God's presence is most salutary to man, for "blessed is the man that shall continue in wisdom, and that shall meditate in his justice, and in his mind shall think of the All-Seeing Eye of God" (Ecclus. 14, 22). How may we cultivate a devotion that springs from this perception of God with us, and what are its fruits?

The Catholic has no difficulty in his belief that God is substantially present in the Holy Eucharist, by reason of his supernatural faith. Upon entering the church his first act of adoration is that of bending the knee, by which he gives outward evidence of his belief that he is in the house of God, and that his Lord is there under the veil of the Sacrament. Christ is present not only to our intellect, when the Sacred Species is exposed on the altar for adoration, but also to our senses. There we see the Christ God with our bodily eyes, not in the manifestation of His glory, but hidden under the humble appearances of bread, for the substance is of God. As looking through a glass we see the object beyond, yet do not advert to the medium through which we see it, so we, by faith, penetrate the mere appearances and behold the substance. As truly as we see the object beyond the glass, so also do we truly see God in the Sacrament of the Altar. Again, when the warning bell rings for the consecration of the Mass, all knees are bent, all heads are bowed in awful expectation of the coming of the Divine Victim of Expiation when the priest shall repeat those words of the Saviour: "This is My Body" (Matt. 26, 26). And lo, we behold Him, Jesus, at the elevation of the Sacred Host. But more wonderful to relate is the presence of God in man at Holy Communion, when the Food of Eternal Life, the Bread of Angels, is placed on the tongue of man, and received into his body and soul; when God abides with man, and man abides with God.

While in church we cannot easily forget that God is there. From the tiny flicker of the sanctuary lamp to the beautiful ceremonies accompanying the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we have ever before us symbols reminding us of that presence. It is when we are away from church and the Blessed Sacrament that we

often lose sight of God. "Out of sight, out of mind": may be very fittingly applied to our consciousness of spiritual things. By our very nature we must depend a great deal upon our senses, through the agency of which we derive all our knowledge. Through the senses, therefore, God, in diverse manners, makes known to us His Presence.

Contemplating this earth resplendent with the glory of the Lord, reason, even unaided, may rise to a knowledge of God, and guided by faith that knowledge becomes more perfect. "Of Him, and by Him, and in Him are all things" (Rom. 11, 36). In the perfection of His works, in their beauty, order, and design, we see a reflection, however dim, of the beauty and perfection of the Creator. Beholding and admiring the magnificence of creatures, we are filled with a consciousness of His wondrous presence. The gay primrose, the modest violet, the flaming poppy, and the sweet-scented lily-of-the-valley: all the flowery kingdom incensing the air with delicate perfumes, gathering the dew of the early morn, scintillating in the bright rays of the sun which it turns with welcome, yet closing delicate petals against the too great heat of the mid-day; in all its splendid coloring and design, generation and growth, and in its preservation and final perfection, this realm of flowers challenges our admiration, inspires us with awe of its Maker and Preserver, and proclaims His Presence. The majesty and strength of the majestic oak, the grandeur of the snow-capped mountain peaks, the mightiness, depths and treasures of the sea, now tranquil as a sleeping child, now lashing and raging with the fury of a multitude of wild beasts, the vastness and beauty of the blue vault of heaven, studded with little lamps of silver, and hung with the sombre globe of mellow gold, while clouds of fleecy white roll and tumble and frisk in an unceasing chase across its broad expanse: these are sights that spell the magnificence and glory of God in our mind and heart, and that lift the soul upward on wings of love and adoration. Under their influence the mind, guided by faith, cannot but feel the presence of God. "The heavens show forth the glory of God, and the firmaments declareth the work of His hands.—Day to day uttereth speech, and night to night showeth knowledge—there are neither speeches nor languages where their voices are not heard" (Ps. 18, 2-4). Again, we read in the Book of Wisdom that "by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the Creator of them may be seen, so as to be known

thereby" (W. 13, 1). Here then we have a method of cultivating the devotion of the Presence of God. To those who see not beyond this world, to scoffers, and those who call themselves wise, yet cannot see a cause outside of creation, we say with St. Paul: "The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God" (I Cor. 2, 14).

From sensible witnesses of God we pass to a consideration of that intellectual witness given to every man, conscience. This faculty keeps alive our consciousness of God's presence if properly attended to, and, when heeded, brings about a closer union of our hearts with the Sacred Heart. For God is constantly making Himself known when He speaks to us through the voice of conscience. By this means He directs us in the paths of righteousness, and discovers to us hidden pitfalls. By it God reveals His own Supreme Majesty, and that dignity which He bestowed upon us, making us little less than angels, when He said, referring to the immortality and dignity of the soul: "Let us make man to Our image and likeness" (Gen. 1, 26). At the same time this voice of God within us lays bare, for our own good, our proneness to evil through the sinfulness of human nature, making us mindful that "the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth" (Gen. 2, 7). God did not speak more truly to Moses from the burning bush than He speaks to each one of us from the lamp of conscience. Man may endeavor to extinguish that lamp, he may deliberately disobey the voice; but it will remain to his anguish, like a thorn in his heart. Obedience to conscience means peace and rest, but "the wicked are like the raging sea, which cannot rest" (Is. 57, 20). This same obedience develops a consciousness of God's presence within us.

Again, by prayer we place ourselves in the presence of God. There is a form of prayer, the highest form of prayer, that can be used at most times and in most places. We need no books to guide us, nor do our lips form a single word, but the mind and heart are lifted to God. This is mental prayer, or meditation. By it the mind dwells upon God, in His attributes, His loving Providence, the ineffable mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption, or any of the multitude of God's revelations to man. Such thoughts excite our memory, imagination, and will, filling the heart with greater love for Him Who made and redeemed us. Such contemplation detached the saints from this world, and brought them to that marvelous union with Christ, filling them

with His grace and love and wisdom. We, by our mental acts of adoration, of thanksgiving, of supplication and atonement, may converse with God and feel His presence. We may feel deep down in our heart and soul the effects of the great truths dwelt upon in meditation, giving us greater love of God and rendering our service more pleasing to Him. "In all thy ways think on Him, and He will direct thy steps" (Prov. 3, 6).

That we might live consciously in the presence of God we have but to reflect that we have been raised to a supernatural state, and that we bear God in our body, whilst we let not ourselves be carried away by the force of our inferior and material arts. "Know you not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you?—Glorify and bear God in your body" (I Cor. 6, 19-20). The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of Love; the love of the Father for the Son, and of the Son for the Father. Being the Spirit of God, it is the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom. As long as we remain in the state of grace, living in the intimate presence of God, and walking with God within us; and as often as we are mindful that the soul is truly the abode of the Living God, we are bound to increase in true wisdom, the wisdom of the just man, and to experience a greater love of God, that personal love which He desires. It is this Christian life of the soul that St. Paul says has been bought with a great price. That price is immeasurable, is infinite, is the Son of God Who offered Himself as a Victim for our sins. As the price is great, so too is the inheritance, for in purchasing us, Christ not only redeemed us from the bondage of sin, but He made us in some respects god-like, by raising us to a supernatural life, making us "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter, 4, 1).

These several ways of being conscious of the presence of God,—through a perception of the divine presence by power and immensity in all being; a responsiveness to the dictates of conscience as to the voice of God; the practice of mental prayer; a realization of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul that is in the state of grace, and the purpose ever to remain in that state: in a word, the consciousness of the fact of God's omnipresence is a source of untold graces and privileges to whomsoever possesses it. It tends toward mankind's sanctification and perfection. Christ came to sanctify, to show man the way to be perfect, even as His Heavenly Father is perfect. "Be you therefore perfect, as also your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt. 5, 48).

Moreover, this consciousness of the Divine Presence, and the regulation of our lives accordingly is the fulfillment of God's command to His people which was given to Abraham: "Walk before Me, and be perfect" (Gen. 17, 1).

—Bro. Joseph Regan, O. P.

IN GETHSEMANE

"My soul is sorrowful even unto death: Stay you here and watch with Me" (Matt. xxvi-38).

Prostrate on the ground!
Drops of blood around!
His soul distressed!
Beloved disciples three
Slept, though agony
That Heart oppressed!

Grief, ah bitter grief!
Even no relief
From Angel hands!
But a cup of gall,—
Sins of each and all,—
Comprise His bands.

In Gethsemane!
Lord, I long to be
To watch with Thee.
Evermore shall I
Strive to live,—to die
And pray with Thee.

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