

April 15, 2011

“Echoes of the Heart”

Reflections on Life and Community Living

The presence and absence of God. As we Christians work our way through the season of Lent, a time of personal and spiritual *sorting out*, it is a time of *going deeper*, an occasion for seeking more meaning and fiber in our connection with God.

Going deeper is all about meanings, feelings and a yearning of the spirit. It is a process, not without its rough edges and personal anguish.

The image that keeps coming back to me is Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night of his betrayal, the day before his crucifixion. It is perhaps the pinnacle *human* moment of Jesus’ life. By now, events and forces of power are moving against him. There is a palpable heaviness in the air.

Taking a couple of his disciples with him—a short time after the *Last Supper* experience—Jesus departs for Gethsemane. With a sense of his betrayal hovering near, he goes off by himself to pray and reflect. Overcome with grief and anguish, he throws himself on the ground, praying—in desperation and yearning—*let this cup of suffering pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want.*

Jesus doesn’t want to die; yet, he wants to be faithful to the powerful presence of God that pulsates in his heart and spirit. What does it all mean? What is he to do?

Always, in our hunger and thirst for a deeper connection to *the holy*, God’s presence and absence live side by side in our lives. They are but different sides of the same thirst.

The life of faith isn’t without its moments of wonder and personal doubt. In talking openly and honestly about our faith, it’s important to be able to tell of both God’s presence *and* God’s absence. To know both, to whatever extent, is to know the human experience.

The thirst for more of God. The key in all of this is that we are thirsty, to begin with, for more of God—for more of the Spirit, more of God’s *holy truth*; for more of God’s grace, forgiveness and love.

Few have known the thirst of God’s absence, for example, more profoundly than Mother Teresa. A few years back, TIME Magazine had a cover story on her where, in her private writings, it was revealed how she experienced long periods of an agonizing sense of abandonment. Jesus might well have experienced some of this same inner torment in his Garden of Gethsemane experience.

Even in the prolonged darkness, however, Mother Teresa’s tenacious spirit helped her cling to the belief that her labor of love on behalf of Calcutta’s hopeless ones gave drink

to Jesus' thirst on the cross. This was her solace, her source of strength and consolation during periods of personal anguish and grief.

The mystery of faith. When we pause for discernment, what is compelling about faith is the utter mystery of the journey. Faith comes to those who seek its coming, but—always—it comes through our relationships and in its own time and own way.

As Jesus asserts in John's gospel (in dialogue with the Pharisee, Nicodemus), *The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.*

So it is with the life of faith. Again, it comes in its own time, with its own nuance and grit, its own music and verse. But the point is if we seek it out and open ourselves to its coming, it comes, indeed. The depths of faith are always more than our ability to explain them.

As people of faith, if we search our hearts in the process of *going deeper*, the process itself becomes its own gift. *The wind blows* through out the process, an unfolding which has no end. And along the way, new meanings and new spiritual awareness feed our spirit and reassure our hearts.

The mystery of faith is part of its beauty. Along with our yearning for *the holy*, it's what invites us to *go deeper*. It is all about the bonds of love that unite us and that draw us in to the web of our common humanity.

May the winds of *the holy* blow through us all in this season that is before us, that God's purposes might stir in our spirit and lead us in God's ways!