

Meeting God in Our Life, Night 1

God knows how to reach us in our divinely-created uniqueness, how to get our attention!

How this Lenten Series Came to Be

October Priest Retreat at Manresa with Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ

Had one book by Fr. Mark, *Armchair Mystic*, which I had read over twenty years ago.

Began to reread, starting with the foreword by Fr. Mark Link, SJ

“The Barna Research Group of Ventura, CA reports that roughly 75 million Christians go to church every Sunday (2001). Why do they go? What are they seeking? Their responses fall in two main categories: (1) a personal experience of God’s presence and (2) a better understanding of how to live the Christian life.

The amazing thing about these ‘75 million Christians’ says George Barna is that they keep coming back to church Sunday after Sunday despite the fact that *fewer than a third* of them feel they accomplish their main reason for coming: ‘to connect with God.’ Eventually, these people ‘*cease to expect a real encounter with God and simply settle for a pleasant experience*,’ Barna concludes. ‘If congregations seem rather complacent about their faith and halfhearted in their commitment...some of that reticence can be traced to the fact that *they lack any personal intimacy with God.*’”

That passage broke my heart.

How do you have a friendship with someone you’re not even sure is there?

How do you have a friendship with someone you never hear from?

Where do we meet God?

How do we know we’ve met God?

I googled St. Ignatius’s most famous words: ***Finding God in All Things!***

Eventually I stumbled upon a book by another Jesuit priest, Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ from Ireland, entitled *Finding God in All Things*. The book had been revised and reissued under the title, *God Is Right in Front of You: A Field Guide to Ignatian Spirituality*.

The foreword was written by Fr. William Barry, SJ. If the foreword to that first book broke my heart, the foreword to this book ignited my heart.

Spell check wants me to change Ignatian to ignition!

Here was the language I needed to help me understand my own experience and to help all those good souls faithfully, humbly seeking God understand their own.

“As the title of this book suggests [*God Is Right in Front of You*], finding God is not as difficult as it sounds. True, God is Mystery itself and will always remain so. But Ignatian spirituality takes seriously that ***God wants to be known by us***. Indeed, God wants to be our friend. That’s right – God wants to be your friend. In light of this truth, ***we can be confident that God will make himself known to us.***”

“Ignatius of Loyola was, by his own account, a seemingly poor candidate for friendship with God when God visited him while he was recuperating from a critical battle wound. That visit from God came in a very ordinary way: through daydreams. Ignatius reasoned that if God revealed himself to him through his experience of daydreams and their aftermath, then ***God must be present everywhere and at every moment of our lives.***”

“Ignatius did not develop his way of helping people meet God through theory but through his own experience. But ***he had to pay attention to his experience*** and then figure out ***how God was communicating with him through his experience***...God is constantly trying to get your attention just as he ingeniously got Ignatius’ attention when he was least expecting it. [Ignatian spirituality will] help you discern how God is communicating to you through your experiences.”

“Ignatian spirituality is remarkably optimistic, possibly because Ignatius never stopped marveling that God would want his friendship. In addition, once he got his own bearings in this new life as a friend of God, he started telling other people about what he had learned and found that they, too, were ***transformed by meeting God personally***. The result was that he wrote a book, the Spiritual Exercises, as a guide for those who wanted to help others meet God and be transformed.”

Stumbling onto Fr. William Barry’s article “*On Asking God to Reveal Himself in Retreat*”

“In Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises the retreatant is advised to ***ask for what he or she desires*** as a prelude to every period of prayer. Retreat directors often spend a great deal of time helping those they direct ***to know what they want of God in prayer and to ask for it.***”

“When the directors probe a bit into these desires, they regularly find that retreatants want to ***experience the closeness and care of God***, but ***hold little hope*** that God will make his presence felt. In other words, some retreatants expect too little of God, have an image of God as being more stingy with his favors than God has revealed himself. This image of God may stem from a sense that God cannot be bothered with the ‘likes of me,’ or that God is a distant and almighty figure. With such an image, whatever its source, retreatants will not have ***those great desires*** that Ignatius hopes for in the exercitant.”

“A retreatant may desire closeness to God, but she may be afraid of God. What she wants and needs is an experience of God that will overcome her fears. She might be encouraged to begin her prayer periods ***by asking God to reveal himself*** in a way that will not frighten her away. ***Then she does something that will give God a chance to answer her request.*** She may take a walk in the park or along the shore; she may quietly read Psalm 139. But she wants a revelation of God that will help her to overcome her ambivalence.”

“One can only know Jesus intimately if he reveals himself. One asks for this grace and then contemplates the gospel stories, not in order to understand the gospels better, but because ***the gospels are privileged writings*** to contemplate in order to give the living Lord Jesus a chance to reveal himself. The purpose of contemplating gospel scenes, in other words, is ***to***

make it easier for the living Lord to show himself. ‘And when he takes on reality and shape for me (not necessarily in a picture, by the way), then I talk to him, not to the text, and I listen to him, not to the text.’”

The Divine Purpose Behind Creation and Redemption

“What does God want in creating us? My stand is that *what God wants is friendship*. Let me say that I do not mean that God is lonely and therefore needs our friendship. No, I maintain that God – out of the abundance of divine relational life, not any need for us – *desires human beings into existence for the sake of friendship*.” AF, xiv

“Can you allow yourself to believe the amazing truth that *God is passionately searching for you at this moment* in the depths of the mess and despair? God knocks on your locked door, asking to be admitted into your life, offering to share your burden and to companion you through the darkness. Can you allow God to love you, to respect you, to give you back your integrity and your hope? Can you accept the dignity of being *a friend of God* and believe that his is one friendship that need never fail?” GRF, chap 5

“*We live within the mystery that is God* (cf. Acts 17:28) God is not a mystery to be solved; rather, we are beings made for Mystery. God is totally beyond our grasp and always will be. But *we are grasped by God*, who sets us down in this world and sustains, invites and welcomes us.” GRF, intro

“Ignatius praises what he dares to call ‘*familiarity with God*.’ We need to dare to engage in this familiarity. For a friendship to deepen, persons need time alone with each other; time to talk and time to listen; time to explore one another’s lives and to catch on to their different values, attitudes and preferences. *Self-disclosure is of the essence of friendship; each person becomes vulnerable*. I ask, ‘Will you accept me just as I am? Will I find that I am ‘handled with care?’ Will my dignity survive your gaze?’” GRF, chap 4

“Love consists in a mutual communication between the two persons. *God wants mutuality, God wants something from each of us human beings*. What can we give to God? What does God need? If God is God, then God needs nothing, lacks nothing. However, *God freely decides to want something* when God creates persons called to enter into the community life of the Trinity. In order to be the God God wants to be for us, we must respond to the call to intimate union.” WD, 119

“God freely decides to be in relationship with people. God wants our love and friendship; God cannot have what God wants unless we freely give of ourselves. *By free choice God becomes dependent on our response in order to be who God wants to be*. This is mind-blowing, isn’t it? Do you want to give what God wants of you? To be more aware of God’s presence in your life at every moment?” WD, 120

“As God did with Mary, God waits for each one of us to respond to the offer of friendship. *In that waiting God is vulnerable*... Though we have a different destiny than Mary in God’s plan, God extends the same offer of friendship, and the historical reality of the future of the world, in some small fashion, *depends on our response* to God’s vulnerability.” AF, 117

“One persistent source of resistance to God’s desire for friendship is the notion that I am too insignificant to be of concern to God. ***God’s love creates us for no other reason than God’s love.*** So, God’s offer of friendship does not depend on our significance, but solely on God’s desire for us.” AF, 89, 94

“If I do not know in my bones that God loves me with an everlasting love, I will not dare to open myself to his gaze and to ask to see myself as he sees me. Yet my relationship with the Lord cannot develop unless I walk through this dark valley and come to know that the love that desired me into being still holds me as the apple of God’s eye, though I have been unfaithful and untrue, even outrageously so.” PA, 18

“As in all friendships, there are also ***companionable silences.*** It may seem that nothing is going on in this simple being with the other, but ***heart is speaking to heart*** at a level too deep for words, and I am changed in the process.” GRF, 4

“I have recently come to believe that God’s intention for the universe, God’s kingdom or rule, if you will, comes about not so much by heroic deeds of the saints, not so much by action to create a more just world, but by ***the willingness of each one of us to let God come close, to let God become our intimate friend.*** The rule of God comes about through friendship, through the love of friendship. As each one of us accepts this friendship, we are transformed. The more intimate we allow God to become, the more like God we become, or as the Greek theologians put it, the more ‘divinized’ we become. Thus our love becomes more universal and embraces all that God dreams for our world.” WD, 184

Bibliography

- GRF** God Is Right in Front of You, Fr. Brian Grogan, SJ
- WD** What Do I Want in Prayer, Fr. William Barry, SJ
- LG** Letting God Come Close, Fr. William Barry, SJ
- AF** A Friendship Like No Other, Fr. William Barry, SJ
- PA** Paying Attention to God, Fr. William Barry, SJ
- EG** Experiencing God in the Ordinary, Fr. William Barry
- AM** Armchair Mystic, Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ
- GV** God's Voice Within, Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ
- RIE** Reimagining the Ignatian Examen, Fr. Mark Thibodeaux, SJ

Prayer Exercises for the Week

Spend Time with Jesus

For 30 minutes, each day that you can, do something you enjoy, something relaxing, something that helps you quiet yourself, and *ask Jesus to go with you.*

You could take a walk, listen to some music, enjoy your garden, enjoy the birds in your neighborhood, go star gazing at night, watch a sunrise or sunset, do some crocheting, woodworking....

You can be quiet and simply enjoy each other's company, you can speak with Jesus as friends speak with each other, you can let Jesus know what's in your mind and heart.

End the Exercise praying the Our Father from your heart.

Prayers of St. Ignatius of Loyola

Anima Christi

Soul of Christ, sanctify me
Body of Christ, save me
Blood of Christ, inebriate me
Water from the side of Christ, wash me
Passion of Christ, strengthen me
O good Jesus, hear me
Within your wounds hide me
Permit me not to be separated from You
From the wicked foe, defend me
In the hour of my death, call me
And bid me to come to You
That with Your saints,
I may praise You
Forever and ever
Amen.

Prayer for Generosity

Lord,
Teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you
as you deserve;
to give and
not to count the cost,
to fight and
not to heed the wounds,
to toil and
not to seek for rest,
to labor and
not to ask for reward,
save that of knowing
that I do your will.
Amen.

Suscipe

Take, Lord, and receive
all my liberty,
my memory,
my understanding,
and my entire will,
all I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours;
do with it what you will.
Give me only your love
and your grace,
that is enough for me.