

DAY 8

II - ATTAINING LOVE

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The key words in our retreat have been: *listening to him, my beloved Son* and also *love*, a love of gratitude, of loyalty, of com-passion with the suffering Lord, of rejoicing with the risen Lord. Yet John in his first letter reminds us: *...it is not we who have loved first, but God loved us first* [1Jn. 4: 10].

We respond to this love with **deeds**, not just with words or feelings. We desire for ourselves an attitude of abiding love of God and we seek to discern how best to respond to this love offered first to us. We find it easier to respond, when we are made aware that God is always present to us all the time, a presence that is independent of our willing it. Such awareness is gift, because God's presence is not sensibly perceptible by us, at least not in the way the gospels tell us that it was visible and tangible to the apostles in the physical presence of the risen Lord.

Scriptures tell us that we can discover God in creation, but Scripture reveals a God-in-action, not a conceptual God. For Scripture God's goodness is not a metaphysical quality, but a continual giving to us, certainly by sustaining us –and all things– in being. Nature documentaries are for us a reminder of God's creative goodness, yet the same admiration needs to be extended to God's supernatural creation in each one of us. The experience of graces received is a more important reminder of God's love for us than nature's magnificence.

God is especially active in me through the people in my life, good people who are a channel of God's goodness to me. People who might impress us as evil are also a reminder of how God has sustained us in our not surrendering to evil. My own personal gifts are also a sign of God's love for me and in their very being rather limited they speak to me of the unlimited source of that limited goodness. Surely those gifts received have been cultivated and developed by me through life, but this very desire to make them fruitful is itself a gift. We need to pray for the gift of desiring to seek God's love in our concrete reality. A former student of mine wrote some poetry he shared with me and two of his verses have remained with me over the years:

*Though hard to show,
love's even harder to hide.*

We need to pray to be helped to discover God's hard-to-hide love.

Striving to seek God in what is painful is not a spontaneous task. Only the one who has found God in the pain and human absurd of Christ's passion and death can seek God in one's own passion and suffering. Even with God's help, seeking God requires a threefold disposition.

FIRST DISPOSITION: openness. Annas and the Sanhedrin missed the message of Lazarus' being returned to life by Jesus. They were not open to that.

SECOND DISPOSITION: alertness. The late French poet Paul Claudel wrote an allegory based on the parable of the good Samaritan. In that allegory the decaying carcass of a dog lies on the side of the road, as people pass that way. A priest and then a Levite come to the scene and each presses his nose to avoid the stench and moves to the other side to keep on going. Claudel then presents some representative persons of that society and they all do the same. Finally, along the road comes a young rabbi from Nazareth and, reaching the spot, he stops and, taking a good look

at the carcass, he exclaims: *how white are those teeth!* The white teeth were there for all to see, but only the young rabbi had the alertness to look at them and discover their whiteness. We need the alertness to stop and look at life situations we may find repulsive. We may discover in them some white teeth that were already there.

THIRD DISPOSITION: having a point of reference. Years ago I was making my retreat in West Virginia, while presiding daily at mass for a community of Sisters. They fully respected my silence, yet, as I was returning from a walk on my last day, an elderly Sister stopped me to tell me that I reminded her of her nephew. I was surprised that, having faced the community at mass every day, no one else had told me that I reminded them of Sr. Bernice's nephew. The reason for that had nothing to do with their respecting my silence, only with the fact that they had never met that nephew and, not being familiar with his facial features, they could not recognize any resemblance. We need familiarity with the Lord's "features", in order to recognize him in the daily situations of our lives. Seeking God in all things can be a helpful light in our practice of self-examination.

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

ATTAINING LOVE

Ps. 19: 1-4

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.
Day unto day pours forth speech;
night unto night whispers knowledge.
There is no speech, no words;
their voice is not heard.

Lk. 12: 24-28

Notice the ravens: they do not sow or reap; they have neither storehouse nor barn, yet God feeds them. How much more important are you than birds! Can any of you by worrying add a moment to your life span? If even the smallest things are beyond your control, why are you anxious about the rest? Notice how the flowers grow. They do not toil or spin. But I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass in the field that grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? As for you, do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not worry anymore.

Other pertinent texts

Ps. 8

When I see the heavens... how great your name!

Wis. 13: 1-9

God can be discovered in God's works.

Jn. 15: 1-5

Christ-vine giving life to the branches.

Eph. 3: 14-19

... that you might know the breadth and length and height and depth of
Christ's love