

DAY 1

I - RESPONDING TO BEING ENCOUNTERED

I - RESPONDING TO BEING ENCOUNTERED BY GOD

In our life experience God has encountered us in many ways and God continues to encounter us in our daily living. Being encountered requires a response to that encounter. So, as a starting point, we can ask the Lord for light to recognize the quality of our response, both its shining moments and its duller moments. The very fact that we desire to make this retreat should tell us that we have not refused to respond, but we need light to assess the quality of our response in God's light.

Paul, a man wholeheartedly committed to Christ, recognized in himself an experience of ambiguity in his responding and he shares that with us in the passage from the letter to the Romans that we are using as reference for the first part of our prayer today. The text is printed out at the end of this section's pages.

In his teaching Jesus used the image of two different seeds in the same field [Mt. 13: 24-30]. We are definitely the Lord's field purchased with his passion and death, a good-soil field as created by God, but a field flawed by occasional disobedience, by the sinfulness we ourselves are aware of at its different levels. Focusing on the specific occurrences of flawed response in our lives is not of central importance, because the root of the specific failures is more important than its concrete manifestations. The fact is that we do not need to plant the bad seed, because it is already there in us as God's field without God's having planted it.

Through God's mercy our specific manifestations today are likely to be of a less radical nature in themselves, but we need to own the root of those manifestations, which can and indeed will sprout new manifestations. There is in us an innate self-centeredness that can make us see others and even the transcendent Other as a threat that limits us. This seems to have been the core of the temptation to our first parents in the garden.

Isaiah [1: 2-3] describes Israel's sin as basic ingratitude of a people so cared for by God:

*Hear, O heavens, and listen, O earth, for the Lord speaks:
Sons have I raised and reared, but they have rebelled against me!
An ox knows its owner, and an ass its master's manger;
but Israel does not know, my people has not understood.*

The prodigal son [Lk. 15: 11-32] is presented as ungrateful to the loving father and blinded by his craving not for liberty, but for libertinism. Yet both in Isaiah and in Luke ingratitude is presented in the context of God's love and forgiveness. In Isaiah the decisive message is: *your sins will be washed away* [1: 18] and: *you have suffered enough* [40: 2]. The parable in Luke is most centrally about the prodigal father, not about the wayward son. The behavior of both sons is a foil to make the father's love shine all the brighter.

A flawed response, a sin, is hard to recognize by a flawed respondent. King David, *a man after God's own heart* [1Sam. 13: 14], needs to have his double sin of adultery and murder revealed to him by the prophet Nathan. The Samaritan woman owns her sin only after Jesus discloses it to her. Jesus points to the Pharisees their blindness to their own sin. Even on the cross He will say: *they do not know what they are doing*. The late Canadian Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan calls this *scotósis* (from the Greek word for darkness), a penchant for darkness, perhaps thinking that “what you do not see won't hurt you”.

We need to ask the Lord for light to dissipate the blindness of our past flawed response to God's desire to encounter us, but this only in the context of utter love. Sin alone is only a half-truth and half-truths are the core of misinformation, something that can be more harmful than outright lies. The complete truth includes God's forgiving love, a forgiveness that is continually present to God, since for God there is no “past”. God is forgiving now sins that to me are past, yet sins that to God remain present and presently forgiven. Only in this context of sustained forgiveness will it be healthy to revisit our past flawed responses, which are a foil that makes God's love shine all the brighter.

The half-truth of sin alone is an unhealthy recognition and it amounts to misinformation. The reality of sin exists only in unity with the reality of the loving forgiveness offered to us. In revisiting past flawed responses, we are not looking for new facts, we are rather revisiting old facts in the new light of being forgiven in love. As we revisit our past flawed responses, we need to be amazed not at our blindness and ingratitude –real though they are, but at the persistent love of the one Francis Thompson called *The Hound of Heaven*. Yes, I do understand myself as sinner, yet one sought after by a God who desires the encounter.

It would be most appropriate to close this part of our day with a prayer at the foot of the crucified Lord, asking myself:

- in the past what response have I made to Christ?
- how am I responding to Christ now in my present moment?
- what response should I make to Christ from now on?

REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

Rom. 7: 15-23

What I do, I do not understand. For I do not do what I want, but I do what I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I concur that the law is good. So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. The willing is ready at hand, but doing the good is not. For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. So, then, I discover the principle that when I want to do right, evil is at hand. For I take delight in the law of God in my inner self, but I see in my members another principle at war with the law of my mind, taking me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.

Other pertinent texts

<i>2Sam. 12: 1-5</i>	David's sin blinds him. Nathan needs to reveal it to him.
<i>13-15</i>	David's recognition of sin.
<i>Is. 1: 2-3</i>	Infidelity-ingratitude toward God.
<i>Mt. 13: 24-30</i>	Two seeds in the same field.
<i>Lk. 15: 11-32</i>	Revelation of son's sin in context of forgiveness.
<i>Jn. 4: 1-26</i>	Samaritan woman's openness begins, as Christ reveals her sin to her.
<i>9: 40-41</i>	Sin-blindness of the Pharisees. Basic attitude: deafness to Father's love