

# **DAY 4**

## **II - TRUSTING OPENNESS FOR ENCOUNTER**

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Are we open to being found? A good Jesuit friend, Fr. Larry Gillick, who is blind, on one occasion left the family cabin in Northern Wisconsin and got lost in the woods. Very resourcefully he listened for noises and heard cars passing not far away from where he was, so he moved to the road and waited, until a driver stopped and took him back to the cabin. When his relatives asked him how he had gotten back, he simply told them: *I placed myself where I could be found*. Are we willing to place ourselves where we can be found, namely, found by God?

Openness to being encountered requires trust on our side and in the last analysis faith boils down to trust. In fact the same Greek word *-pístis-* can be translated as either faith or trust. Faith rests on trust, not on evidence. In the presence of evidence we do not need faith, we simply ascertain. I do not *believe* that 2 + 2 is 4, this is simply something I can ascertain. Faith, which moves beyond rational evidence, is not irrational, but simply meta-rational, and that is why it rests on trust. We do not believe someone we do not trust and we do not trust someone we do not believe. At the end of this section's pages read on God's call to Abram [Gen. 12: 1-3]

Like the Samaritan woman encountered by Jesus at the well, Abram was encountered by God while he was "minding his own business" and he was asked to trust: *walk in my presence, I will tell you where to*. In our culture we may be suffering from a Google Maps syndrome or a GPS syndrome, a need to be provided with a highlighted route to our destination. Abram was not given a GPS and in fact not even a destination.

This was also Mary's predicament "from the word go", when encountered by God through the angel. She too was "minding her own business". And just as her predicament was like that of Abram, so also was her stance. I am not sure that Mary understood what was being asked of her. She did not say *I am willing to be the mother of the Messiah*, but simple *let what you have told me be done in me*. Even if she was not fully understanding, she was certainly trusting. We are told that she kept *pondering in her heart* when surprised: by the arrival of the shepherds, by Simeon's words, by her child's response in the temple. When we *ponder in our hearts*, we do not look for explanation, but for meaning. Explanation can make us **sure**, while meaning makes us be **assured**, an assuredness that comes from an inner stance that rests on trust.

Mary was **assured**, even when she could not be **sure**. She moved from not understanding to not needing to understand, particularly at the foot of the cross –how could a mother **understand** the execution of her innocent child? Mary's *pondering* was seeking meaning, not explanation; seeking not *why?*, but *what does this mean in my relationship with God?* Hers was a stance of trust in the God who had encountered her, even as she knew neither the destination nor the path. Such was also Abram's stance when encountered by God.

The Spanish poet Antonio Machado wrote something that is pertinent here:

*Wayfarer, there is no path.  
A path is made by walking.*

Mary made her path as she *pondered in her heart* and she kept on moving with complete trust.

The Lord chided his disciples for not understanding their need to trust: *When I sent you without purse or sandals... did you lack anything?* They had had the experience, but they had missed its meaning. They had failed to *ponder in their hearts* to discover meaning and the lack of meaning had weakened their trust.

The rich young man who took the initiative to encounter Jesus [Mt. 19: 16-22] was ultimately paralyzed, because he was not able to entrust himself to the One he had encountered and thus he declined being encountered by that itinerant Teacher.

The image of the potter's shop [Jer. 18: 1-5] is a touching image of trust. Even when being reshaped, or perhaps especially when being reshaped, we are in good hands, in God's hands, and we are invited to remain supple in those hands.

In John's gospel [15: 1-2] Jesus tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches and that his Father is the vine dresser, who prunes the vine as needed. Sometimes we may feel the pain or discomfort of being pruned, yet being pruned is a good sign, for it is only the fruitful branches that are pruned, while the unfruitful ones are simply burned. We need to trust the vine dresser.

There are times, when we feel that we have all the right answers and this gives us some sense of power, for it eliminates any sensed need for trust and it makes *listening* appear unnecessary. Instead Jesus offers us *the right questions* and he asks us to embark in a journey of trust. Our faith is not God's answer to our questions, but God's question to our pre-conceived answers like *who is God for me?* or *what is God inviting me to do?* If we want to grow, we need to trust enough to be willing to take risks. The day we start looking for security in everything we consider being involved with we will have shut the door on our capacity to grow in commitment to the Christ who encounters us. Commitment to this Christ is what will make us be **assured**.

The twentieth century writer John Macmurray spoke about what he called false religion as opposed to true religion in words that can be applied to false trust and true trust:

*False religion tells us: all those things you are afraid of, do not worry, because God will see to it that they will never happen to you. By contrast true religion tells us: all these things you are afraid of may well happen, but they are nothing to be afraid of, because you will not be alone when they happen. God will be with you.*

It is this trust that will make us be **assured**.

## REFERENCE SCRIPTURE PASSAGES

### TRUSTING OPENNESS FOR ENCOUNTER

#### Gen. 12: 1-3

The LORD said to Abram: Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will find blessing in you.

**Jer. 18:1-6**

This word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Arise and go down to the potter's house; there you will hear my word. I went down to the potter's house and there he was, working at the wheel. Whenever the vessel of clay he was making turned out badly in his hand, he tried again, making another vessel of whatever sort he pleased. Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do to you, house of Israel, as this potter has done? —oracle of the Lord. Indeed, like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, house of Israel.

**OTHER TEXTS ON TRUSTING OPENNESS**

<i>Gen. 22: 1-9</i>	Letting go of Isaac.
<i>Mt. 6: 25-34</i>	Trust in Providence.
<i>Lk. 1: 26-38</i>	<i>Fiat</i> “what you have said to me”