

How do you reach God?

**Know there is no distance.**

Now here's the thing; the distance talked about is not a matter of physical distance – like I'm standing across the street from God. The distance is a matter of thinking and the perception created by my thinking. As long as I'm thinking I'm creating a perception of distance. I'm filling my mind with ideas instead of leaving room for the Divine Presence that is loving me into existence at this moment. I am substituting ideas for the reality of God's who is here expressing divinity at this moment. I am believing my thoughts instead of being in the truth of this moment.

However, even this is another thought, an idea that distances me from the reality of God as the true presence – both Divine presence and my presence. Meister Eckhart tried to describe the non-distance of Divine Presence this way: "The eye with which I see God is the same as which God sees me." My being, my existence, my living is the same reality of God living me. Unfortunately even holding these profound thoughts in my mind creates distance. To move beyond this distance we have to free our minds from thinking – at least for a moment. And that is actually what started me down this path this morning. During meditation I did have a few empty moments or non-thinking. They were simple, free, and peaceful "seeing." You probably should stop reading these thoughts and look through your eyes. You'll be seeing God seeing through you and your seeing through divine eyes.

But I write on. I'm afraid that this not only seems like mind games but also may be just that. I've noticed that when I focus on just seeing that I am momentarily at peace, which is to say, "in divine presence." But as soon as I recognize this I begin to think about it and my thoughts intrude again.

Part of the reason I write is to become aware of my resistances to seeing and to gain awareness of the limits of my perspective. Often this allows me to let go a little more and open to the breadth of Divine Presence. I've found through the years of experience that my spiritual path needs three basic attitudes, acted upon over and over. These attitudes are : Awareness; Non-judgmental Acceptance of what I'm becoming aware of; and Willingness to Trust that the awareness is leading me beyond itself. I've found over and over that what feels like a

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breakthrough is simply a doorway to another perspective which will give way to another awareness. Throughout my life I've often felt like a new awareness and perspective have left me on my own. I feel like I'm stepping into the unknown, with no safety net from my belief system.

Some paths have led to dead ends. But others have led to the most important decisions in my life. And at the beginning both the dead end paths and the wise decisions felt the same. I had to travel along the path before I had a clue as to its value. I believe that God is with me and guides me through all of these paths. God is with me and guides me even in the wrong choices. God doesn't seem to need to protect me from my choices. God just uses my choices to continue to guide me. And I have learned over and over that the Gospels eventually alert me to Jesus' guidance in dealing with these paths and subsequent choices. Jesus too learned who his Father was through choices, dead ends and trusting the Spirit to guide him. Jesus needed people in his life to open his heart to the Father's presence and guidance. And Jesus often stepped out of activity into silence to be alone with his Father.

This is where my "seeing" leads me at this moment. Every once in a while it leads me to panoramic visions that speak to me on every level of my being and inspire me to continue on. Most often this seeing leaves me temporarily satisfied and inspired to accept these moments with gratitude.

At times I feel that I'm addicted to these moments of "seeing." Instead of enjoying them for what they are and resting in their gift I immediately look for the next breakthrough of "seeing." Instead of grateful acceptance I push ahead to a new fix. This is why I'm exploring the "present moment." I believe that this is a necessary discipline and practice. It's something missing in my spiritual living that is necessary to become present to the loving reality of Trinity expressing itself in my life. The "present moment" dissolves the distance.

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#### INNER VIEWS

I spent a lot of time in the last two weeks watching the political conventions. I can't say that my opinions about either party have changed much. That's not

surprising. It's very clear to me that I start with a point of view and I want that point of view affirmed. And it was affirmed far more by one party than the other. Everything they said made sense to me, while the other party left me cold. And yet when I listened to the commentators they said exactly the opposite. The party they favored made sense while the other party only told lies. We all start with a point of view that creates our perceptions. So how do we arrive at "truth?"

At the same time I was very much aware that my point of view is not "the truth" or "the answer." I carry this paradox around within me: I am stuck on my point of view and I want you to agree with it, but I don't think that my point of view is the answer. It's just the best I can do at this moment. That doesn't make it correct. And still the other point of view makes no sense. I'd love to be open to it and let it balance my point of view, but when it is presented in conflict with my point of view I respond defensively rather than openly. And so does the person with a contrary point of view.

And here's the thing, I'm very much bothered when people believe that their point of view is "correct" without any doubt. I don't understand how they can be so convinced. Mostly because, the bottom line for me is that there is no simple and correct solution. Life is far too complex to be reduced to "an answer" or "the truth." I believe that life is lived by engaging in it and reflecting on it with other people.

But when people are totally convinced by their point of view then they can't engage in the complexity of living. There is no chance for wisdom. Living is reduced to moralism and their point of view is at best a half truth, but usually not even that. It often demonizes the opposite point of view and judges it with half-truths.

For most of my priesthood I've had the tremendous good fortune to be with groups of people who can share their opinions without imposing them. As a matter of fact I do my best to avoid people who just get angry and insist on their opinion. I know from experience that there will be no real conversation. I end up reacting, getting angry myself and defensive and often take the opposite point of view in defiance. That does me no good and goes absolutely nowhere.

On the other hand I've come to treasure discussions and the people sharing them, when there's a gentleness and acceptance among the group. A humble gentleness and willingness to explore is essential for a conversation. When this happens there is room for the vulnerability needed to give us a creative and inclusive dialogue. At the end of these kinds of encounters I feel graced and engaged. I feel like I'm a better person just from being with these people.

I believe that this kind of conversation is essential for my spiritual development. Traditionally people have gone to gurus or spiritual directors for the help they need in further development. I hope this doesn't just show my arrogance but in my forty years of being a priest I've run into few people who had answers for me. I believe, and it is my experience, that a group of people who are comfortable enough with themselves and one another to be vulnerable, are my best spiritual advisors. I also believe that this group needs a mix of personalities and the complementarity of female and male participants.

All of this is a complicated introduction to this simple insight; to live in the graced reality of the present moment needs the support and presences of respectful, humble, explorers. To be in the present moment is all about presence, being present openly and honestly with as little guile as possible, without our egos getting in the way and without condemning them when they do show up.

Presence is a basic way of being that allows us to relate to the "truth" of the moment. And it is in the full truth of the moment that we become alert to the reality of our intimacy with God.

Let me return to my opening observations. I believe we have degenerated into a egocentric, radically self-centered and defensive and compulsively aggressive approach that blinds us to the reality of the present moment. This is increasingly clear in our public, political discourse. The calculating mind of the ego reads everything in terms of personal advantage, short-term effort, and "What's in it for me?" And then, to bolster an advantage, it turns the other half of the truth in terms of "wrong" and "the enemy." As far as I can see, and I worry that my seeing is just another half-truth, we don't need different ideas, we need a more spiritual approach to reality. The spiritual mind, built on meditation and prayer,

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see beyond the ego, to a more inclusive and creatively open ended perspective. It can do this only when it is rooted in the real presence of divinely unconditional love.

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