

What is the basis of our security? When we start thinking about that question, we may give many answers: success, money, friends, property, popularity, family connections, insurance, and so on. We may not always think that any of these forms the basis of our security, but our actions or feelings may tell us otherwise. When we start losing our money, our friends, or our popularity, our anxiety often reveals how deeply our sense of security is rooted in these things. A spiritual life is a life in which our security is based not in any created things as good as they may be, but in God, who is everlasting love. We probably will never be completely free from our attachment to the temporal world, but if we want to *live* in that world in a truly free way, we'd better not *belong* to it. "You cannot serve both of God and wealth" (Luke 16:13).

To be able to enjoy fully the many good things the world has to offer, we must be detached from them. To be detached does not mean to be indifferent or uninterested. It means to be nonpossessive. Life is a gift to be grateful for and not a property to cling to.

A nonpossessive life is a free life. But such freedom is only possible when we have a deep sense of belonging. To whom then do we belong! We belong to God, and the God to whom we belong has sent us into the

created in and by love and calls us to gratitude and joy. That is what the "detached" life is all about. It is a life in which we are free to offer praise and thanksgiving.

(BFJ, FEBRUARY 19-20)

PRACTICING GRATITUDE

Resentment and gratitude cannot coexist, since resentment blocks the perception and experience of life as a gift. My resentment tells me that I don't receive what I deserve. It always manifests itself in envy.

Gratitude, however, goes beyond the "mine" and "thine" and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. In the past I always thought of gratitude as a spontaneous response to the awareness of gifts received, but now I realize that gratitude can also be lived as a discipline. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy.

Gratitude as a discipline involves a conscious choice. I can choose to be grateful even when my emotions and feelings are still steeped in hurt and resentment. It is amazing how many occasions present themselves in which I can choose gratitude instead of complaint. I can choose to be grateful when I am criticized, even when my heart still responds in bitterness

... choose to speak about goodness and beauty, even when my inner eye still looks for someone to accuse or something to call ugly. I can choose to listen to the voices that forgive and to look at the faces that smile, even while I still hear words of revenge and see grimaces of hatred.

There is always the choice between resentment and gratitude because God has appeared in my darkness, urged me to come home, and declared in a voice filled with affection: "You are with me always, and all I have is yours." Indeed, I can choose to dwell in the darkness in which I stand, point to those who are seemingly better off than I, lament about the many misfortunes that have plagued me in the past, and thereby wrap myself up in my resentment. But I don't have to do this. There is the option to look into the eyes of the One who came out to search for me and see therein that all I am and all I have is pure gift calling for gratitude.

The choice for gratitude rarely comes without some real effort. But each time I make it, the next choice is a little easier, a little freer, a little less self-conscious. Because every gift I acknowledge reveals another and another until, finally, even the most normal, obvious, and seemingly mundane event or encounter proves to be filled with grace. There is an Estonian proverb that says, "Who does not thank for little will not thank for much." Acts of gratitude make one grateful because, step by step, they reveal that all is grace. (RPS, 80)

LOVING OUR ENEMIES

Jesus' words, "love your enemies," are among the most important in the Gospel. These words bring us to the heart and center of love. As long as love is a matter of tit for tat, we can't love our enemies. Our enemies are those who withhold love from us and make life difficult for us. We are inclined spontaneously to hate them and to love only those who love us.

Jesus, however, will have no part in such bartering. He says:

If you love those who love you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit can you expect? For even sinners do that much.

—LUKE 6:32-34

Jesus shows us that true love, the love that comes from God, makes no distinction between friends and foes between people who are for us and people who are against us, between people who do us a favor and people who do us ill. God . . . loves all human beings, good or bad, with the same unconditional love. This all-embracing love Jesus offers to us, and he invites us to make this love visible in our lives. If our love, like God

love, embraces foe as well as friend, we have become children of God and are no longer children of suspicion, jealousy, violence, war, and death. Our love for our enemies shows to whom we really belong. It shows our true home. . . .

When we know that God loves us deeply and will always go on loving us, whoever we are and whatever we do, it becomes possible to expect no more of our fellow men and women than they are able to give, to forgive them generously when they have offended us, and always to respond to their hostility with love. By doing so we make visible a new way of being human and a new way of responding to our world problems. . . .

Martin Luther King, Jr., understood that hating whites could not lead to true equality among Americans. Gandhi knew that hating the British could not bring about genuine independence in India. A new world without slaughter and massacre can never be the fruit of hatred. It is the fruit of the love of your Father in heaven, "for he causes his sun to rise on the bad as well as the good, and sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike" (Matthew 5:45). . . .

Whenever, contrary to the world's vindictiveness, we love our enemy, we exhibit something of the perfect love of God, whose will is to bring all human beings together as children of one Father. Whenever we forgive instead of letting fly at one another, bless instead of cursing one another, tend one another's wounds

instead of rubbing salt into them, hearten instead of discouraging one another, give hope instead of driving one another to despair, hug instead of harassing one another, welcome instead of cold-shouldering one another, thank instead of criticizing one another, praise instead of maligning one another . . . in short, whenever we opt for and not against one another, we make God's unconditional love visible; we are diminishing violence and giving birth to a new community.

(LM, 53-55)

BEING-WITH, GRATEFULLY

Two words that I think are helpful for ministry are "compassion" and "gratitude." Ministry happens when you participate in the mystery of being-with. The whole Incarnation, God-with-us, Emmanuel, is first of all being with people. Caring means "to cry out with." Compassion literally means "to be with those who suffer." Ministry means that we lift the Incarnation—we lift the God who says, "I will be with you." We are to be precisely where people are vulnerable, not to fix it or to change it. That is an unintended fruit of it, but that is not why you are there.

Compassion is the priesthood of Jesus—read the letter to the Hebrews. Since nothing human was alien to him, he was the compassionate high priest. Jesus is

first of all God-with-us. For thirty years he was just living in a small village, living the same life that we live. It was only for three years that he was preaching. So even when you look at it in a spiritual way, Jesus' ministry wasn't just the three years he was preaching. The mystery is that he shared our lives. God is a God-with-us. Ministry is being with the sick, the dying, being with people wherever they are, whatever their problems. We dare to be with them in their weakness and trust that if we are entering into people's vulnerable places, we will experience immense joy. That is the mystery of ministry.

You can't solve the world's problems, but you can be with people. I've been with two people who were dying in the last months. It wasn't a burden—it was a great joy to have the privilege to be there when they made their passage.

If I follow God, I pray, I say certain things, and I tell others in need that I care. But I don't sit down beforehand and plan how to get this person from here to there. If I am not in communion with God or in community with other people, then I become a technician who got involved, but as a technician I cannot lay down my life for my friends. My life is my joy, my peace, and my sorrow. Ministry is witness. It's nothing else but saying, "I've seen something, I've experienced something, and I'm not afraid to share it with you if you ask me to." . . .

Gratitude is also essential to ministry. Gratitude basically means to receive the gifts of others—to say thank you for being you. It is a central part of ministry to receive the gifts of others. Only when you yourself have experienced your own giftedness can you be free. We have a desire to get things to other people so that we can be on the giving side. We forget that the greater joy for other people is for them to realize that they have something to give to us. . . . I'm the mediator of that. I need to be there with them. They cannot give their gifts if I'm not there to make it visible. (PW, 15-16)

HOSPITALITY: MY HOUSE IS YOURS

Once we have found the center of our life in our own heart and have accepted our aloneness, not as a fate but as a vocation, we are able to offer freedom to others. Once we have given up our desire to be fully fulfilled, we can offer emptiness to others. Once we have become poor, we can be a good host. It is indeed the paradox of hospitality that poverty makes a good host. Poverty is the inner disposition that allows us to take away our defenses and convert our enemies into friends. We can perceive the stranger as an enemy only as long as we have something to defend. But when we say, "Please enter—my house is your house, my joy is your joy, my sadness is your sadness, and my life is

your life," we have nothing to defend, since we have nothing to lose but all to give.

Turning the other cheek means showing our enemies that they can be our enemies only while supposing that we are anxiously clinging to our private property, whatever it is: our knowledge, our good name, our land, our money, or the many objects we have collected around us. But who will be our robber when everything he wants to steal from us becomes our gift to him? Who can lie to us when only the truth will serve him well? Who wants to sneak into our back door when our front door is wide open?

Poverty makes a good host.

(Ro, 102-3)

WISHING TO HOPING

We live in a world where people don't know much about hope. We know about wishes. The whole Christmas period is full of wishes. I wish this, or I want that. It's very concrete: I want a toy or a car or a new job. These are all very specific requests. But hope is precisely to say, "I don't know how God is going to fulfill his promises, but I know that he will, and therefore I can live in the present with the knowledge that he is with me."

I can then know and trust that the deepest desires of my being will be fulfilled. This way keeps the future

very open. It's not a controlling kind of thing; it's not saying, "I want to be sure I have all these things in place when I get there." It's not the anxious, controlling, nervous ego wondering if it will have enough to survive.

Hope has nothing to do with optimism. Many people think that hope is optimism, looking at the positive side of life. But Jesus doesn't speak like that at all. When Jesus talks about the future or the end of the world, he describes wars, people in anguish, nation rising against nation, and earthquakes. There's no place where Jesus says, "One day it will all be wonderful." He talks about enormous agony, but he says: "You, you [my beloved ones] pray unceasingly that you will keep your heart focused on me. Stand with your head erect in the presence of the Son of Man. Don't get distracted by it all. Remain focused." Don't think that things will clean up, and finally there won't be any more pain. Jesus is saying that the world is dark and will remain dark.

[But] if you live with hope, you can live very much in the present because you can nurture the footprints of God in your heart and life. You already have a sense of what is to come. And the whole of the spiritual life is saying that God is right with us, right now. So that we can wait for his coming, and this waiting is a waiting in hope. But because we wait with hope we know that what we are waiting for is already here. We have to nurture that. Here and now matters because God is a

God of the present. And God is God of the present because he is God of eternity.

Hope is to open yourself up to let God do his work in you in ways that transcend your own imagination. As Jesus said, "When you were young you put your belt on and went where you wanted to go. But when you grow spiritually old, then you stretch out your hands and let others and God lead you where you rather wouldn't go" (John 21:18). That's hope, to let yourself be led to new places.

(THN)

EXPECTING JOY

For Jesus, joy is clearly a deeper and more truthful state of life than sorrow. He promises joy as the sign of new life: "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy. A woman in childbirth suffers, because her time has come; but when she has given birth to the child she forgets the suffering in her joy that a human being has been born into the world. So it is with you: you are sad now, but I shall see you again, and your hearts will be full of joy, and that joy no one shall take from you" (John 16:20b-22).

Jesus connects joy with the promise of seeing him again. In this sense, it is similar to the joy we experience when a dear friend returns after a long absence.

But Jesus makes it clear that joy is more than that. It is "his own joy," flowing from the love he shares with his heavenly Father and leading to completion. "Remain in my love . . . so that my own joy may be in you and your joy may be complete" (John 15:9b, and 11).

The word "ecstasy" helps us to understand more fully the joy that Jesus offers. The literal meaning of the word can help to guide our thinking about joy. "Ecstasy" comes from the Greek *ekstasis*, which in turn is derived from *ek*, meaning out, and *stasis*, a state of standing still. To be ecstatic literally means to be outside of a static place. Thus, those who live ecstatic lives are always moving away from rigidly fixed situations and exploring new, unmapped dimensions of reality. Here we see the essence of joy. Joy is always new. Whereas there can be old pain, old grief, and old sorrow, there can be no old joy. Old joy is not joy! Joy is always connected with movement, renewal, rebirth, change—in short, with life.

Joy is essentially ecstatic since it moves out of the place of death, which is rigid and fixed, and into the place of life, which is new and surprising. "God is God not of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22:32). There is no tinge of death in God. God is pure life. Therefore living in the house of God is living in a state of constant ecstasy, in which we always experience the joy of being alive.

(L, 87-88)

CHOOSING CYNICISM OR JOY

For me it is amazing to experience daily the radical difference between cynicism and joy. Cynics seek darkness wherever they go. They point always to approaching dangers, impure motives, and hidden schemes. They call trust naive, care romantic, and forgiveness sentimental. They sneer at enthusiasm, ridicule spiritual fervor, and despise charismatic behavior. They consider themselves realists who see reality for what it truly is and who are not deceived by "escapist emotions." But in belittling God's joy, their darkness calls forth only more darkness.

People who have come to know the joy of God do not deny the darkness, but they choose not to live in it. They claim that the light that shines in the darkness can be trusted more than the darkness itself and that a little bit of light can dispel a lot of darkness. They point each other to flashes of light here and there and remind each other that they reveal the hidden but real presence of God. They discover that there are people who heal each other's wounds, forgive each other's offenses, share their possessions, foster the spirit of community, celebrate the gifts they have received, and live in constant anticipation of the full manifestation of God's glory.

Every moment of each day I have the chance to choose between cynicism and joy. Every thought I have can be cynical or joyful. Every word I speak can be cynical or joyful. Every action can be cynical or joyful. Increasingly I am aware of all these possible choices, and increasingly I discover that every choice for joy in turn reveals more joy and offers more reason to make life a true celebration in the house of the Father.

(RPS, 109)

LET THE CATCHER CATCH

The Flying Rodleighs are trapeze artists who perform in the German circus Simoneit-Barum. When the circus came to Freiburg two years ago, my friends Franz and Reny invited me and my father to see the show. I will never forget how enraptured I became when I first saw the Rodleighs move through the air, flying and catching as elegant dancers. [Gradually, the Rodleighs and I] became good friends.

One day, I was sitting with Rodleigh, the leader of the troupe, in his caravan, talking about flying. He said, "As a flyer, I must have complete trust in my catcher. The public might think that I am the great star of the trapeze, but the real star is Joe, my catcher. He has to be there for me with split-second precision and

grab me out of the air as I come to him in the long jump." "How does it work?" I asked. "The secret," Rodleigh said, "is that the flyer does nothing and the catcher does everything. When I fly to Joe, I have simply to stretch out my arms and hands and wait for him to catch me and pull me safely over the apron behind the catchbar."

"You do nothing!" I said, surprised. "Nothing," Rodleigh repeated. "The worst thing the flyer can do is to try to catch the catcher. I am not supposed to catch Joe. It's Joe's task to catch me. If I grabbed Joe's wrists, I might break them, or he might break mine, and that would be the end for both of us. A flyer must fly, and a catcher must catch, and the flyer must trust, with outstretched arms, that his catcher will be there for him."

When Rodleigh said this with so much conviction, the words of Jesus flashed through my mind: "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit." Dying is trusting in the catcher. To care for the dying is to say, "Don't be afraid. Remember that you are the beloved child of God. He will be there when you make your long jump. Don't try to grab him; he will grab you. Just stretch out your arms and hands and trust, trust, trust."

(OGG, 66-67)

A TRUSTING HEART

The most important characteristic of the human person . . . is the heart. What is the heart? It is the place of trust, a trust that can be called faith, hope, or love. . . . It is not so much the ability to think, to reflect, to plan, or to produce that makes us different from the rest of creation, but the ability to trust. It is the heart that makes us truly human.

This [is] why we respond with our hearts to our surroundings long before our consciences are developed. Our consciences, which allow us to distinguish between good and evil and thus give us a basis for moral choice, are less in control than our hearts. . . . Much of the crisis in the life of the Church today is connected with a lack of knowledge of the heart.

Much Church discussion today focuses on the morality of human behavior: premarital sex, divorce, homosexuality, birth control, abortion, and so on. Many people have become disillusioned with the Church because of these issues. But when the moral life gets all the attention, we are in danger of forgetting the primacy of the mystical life, which is the life of the heart. . . . The mystical life, a life in which we enter into a unifying communion with God, is the highest fruit and most precious reward of the moral life. . . .

Human affections do not lead us where our hearts want to lead us. The heart is much wider and deeper than our affections. It is before and beyond the distinctions between sorrow and joy, anger and lust, fear and love. It is the place where all is one in God, the place where we truly belong, the place from which we come and to which we always yearn to return. (RD, 47-49)