

inner sounds

I GET WEARY OF TAKING PEN IN HAND AND TRYING TO THINK ON paper late at night. But always I remember that someone who is alone or afraid or just bored with life might someday read some small passage from these notes and take new courage or feel less alone or want to start living again. And perhaps that's why we pray when we are tired. Perhaps there is someone somewhere who needs our voice because his or hers sticks in the throat, or they have given up praying altogether. And we cannot sleep until we pray in their stead. Each of us is capable of being an instrument for another's cry or another's song. We join with Christ in redeeming our brothers and sisters. We cannot redeem them, but we have it in our power to effect some small change because we are joined to Christ, their Redeemer and Lord. We do make a difference for good or bad in all our brothers and sisters.

IN COMMUNION

With these woods again,
These trees waiting always
At the edge of the property,
The border of my solitude.

LATE AT NIGHT WHEN ALL THE SOUNDS OUTSIDE ARE QUIET, THE inner sounds sometimes clamor to be heard, and we toss and turn trying to still their demands. It is always the same: They win for a while and finally sleep comes—too late to bring that needed healing of mind and body.

I REACH out to you, O Lord,
And all I touch is my own emptiness,
Air and silence and the memory
That this kind of prayer never works for me.
When I am most in need,
Prayer never seems to help.
It only strengthens my own helplessness.
In your own way, in your own time
You will answer. That I know, that
I remember. So once again I lean on
Patience. I wait. As before, there is
This waiting, this dread that I
Won't hold out. But I do, and
That is perhaps your answer.
We cannot stamp our feet or cry
And expect you to come running.
We only say, "Into your hands, O Lord."
And there is peace, for you are faithful
If not prompt, and you will answer
When you will answer. Amen.

GOD IS LOVE. THAT IS ALL WE KNOW AND ALL THAT MATTERS IN THE end. For to say, "God is love," means that we are loved, and therefore we can love. Loving is all we can do that matters now or ever, and that is possible only because God is love. To love is to be, for

God *is* love. When we love, we *are*, for God is because God loves. I don't know if I understand this, but it consoles me.

I NEVER SEEM TO THANK YOU, GOD, AS EARNESTLY AS I ENTREAT YOU. Yet somehow I know that thanking you is much of what prayer is about. You are so good and so faithful and that alone should make my whole life an act of thanksgiving. And when on top of that, I call to mind all that you have done in my life, the countless attentions, the growing within me, the obstacles you have removed, the gift of your presence, I blush at my ingratitude and indifference at times. Like the sparrows that have always been in my life, you are so present that I take you for granted. And therefore I thank you now in the Eucharist, that perfect act of thanksgiving in which you give thanks for me, even when at Mass my mind and heart are elsewhere.

IN THE CRISES AND SORROWS OF OUR LIVES ONE OF THE FIRST questions we ask is, will someone be there, will anyone help to support us? In my own life this has become almost *the* definition of God: the One who is there. Not just in crises, of course, but always. And yet it is most difficult to believe that God is there if there is not another human being there as well. Perhaps it is the weakness of my faith, but it is so hard to believe that God is here with me if there is no one else besides. When others stand with us and beside us, God shines forth in our midst. So maybe God keeps coming to us in the form of those “angels” who look like human beings.

ONE DAY IS MUCH LIKE ANOTHER IN THE SEARCH FOR GOD. BUT from time to time there is a sudden, unexpected revelation, or shining forth of God. You're startled that you realize God is everywhere, in everything and everyone. Call it insight, epiphany, baptism in the spirit, or any other name, it is the same experience: The God within you is revealed fleetingly, and all the rest of your days are changed

permanently. Something happens that you did not merit and that you cannot explain or communicate. But it is more real than any communicable experience, and you cannot formulate it or capture it in words; for to do so would be to have some hold on God, who cannot be captured in a phrase or formula. Nor can you, by remembering it, recapture the experience. It is gift; it is grace. The spirit blows where it will.

the silence inside

THE SILENCE OF GOD. IT IS SO DEAFENING THAT IF YOU ARE looking for a voice like any human voice that you can hear, you will surely give up on prayer and finally on God. God has spoken through the Scriptures and once for all through Jesus Christ, his Son. And that is all in the past. Or is it?

One of the surest effects of prayer is the conviction that God speaks to me here and now. God's voice is not something I hear with my human ear, but something inside me that vibrates to the word of God spoken in utter silence at the core of my being. God's voice is not a constant sound, but a presence that resonates somewhere deep within. And that felt resonance, like the mere touch of someone we love, is sufficient to keep us going months on end.

In saying that this experience is *felt* resonance, I do not mean to imply that the experience of God is necessarily an emotional experience felt along the heart. It is more often than not a deep conviction that something has happened or is happening to me that can be explained only by some divine epiphany, some shining forth, or revelation of the God who is always within me and who lets me experience that presence from time to time.

It is futile then to wait and listen for a voice from heaven to ring in the ear with some answer. The answer dwells within us, and now and then, it is uncovered and we know inexplicably that God is there.

“Credo ut experiar.” “I believe in order that I may experience.”

—Saint Bernard

TO MOST MODERNS “DETACHMENT” IS A MEDIEVAL, DEHUMANIZING word that separates us from the goodness and beauty of creation. It means separation and alienation from the nitty-gritty world. But that is not what spiritual detachment means. Like so much of the Christian mystery, detachment paradoxically means total involvement with life as we ordinarily understand that term. In order to be totally involved with you, I must somehow be detached from dependence on you; and if I am detached, you will not be enslaved by my involvement with you. It is as simple in essence, and as difficult to achieve, as that. And no one understands this perfect freedom and total involvement but him or her who has been loved by a saint. So once again the proof of words is verified in experience; without experience words are unconvincing, divisive and problematical.

GOD HAS CALLED EACH OF US TO A SPECIAL SERVICE OF LOVE AND sharing. Most of the time that service is rendered in our ordinary, everyday living, but somehow we fail to see this fact and are constantly looking elsewhere to find ourselves. We think that our real call from God, our real identity, is just around the next corner, that surely God has something other in mind for us than the commonplace demands of our own families and friends, of our own neighborhood, our own town. And because of this attitude, we miss the real opportunities to discover who we really are, and we fail to grow to the stature in Christ that God intends for us. Jesus grew to manhood and holiness in the carpenter shop at Nazareth learning to live with and to love his parents, relatives and neighbors. We grow in love and holiness in the same way.

LORD, YOU draw me out.
You are more insistent
Than I want to believe
And so I fail to see my
Troubles as your probing,
Your way of saying that
I need to grow. I am
So blind to you that I
Pray for deliverance
From what you send
To make me whole.
Give me light to see by.