

Looking at God Looking at Me The Act of the Presence of God

Anthony DeMello, a Jesuit spiritual teacher and psychotherapist, had a lovely story of a way we might talk to Jesus. He describes a man who was dying, and who had placed a chair by his bedside. When Tony asked him what the chair was for, he said that he imagined Jesus sitting there, being with him, watching him and talking to him. Some days later the man's daughter called to say he had died. She said he was alone when he died, but the family had been struck by two things when they found him: he had looked very peaceful, and he was lying with his head resting on the chair beside his bed.



This story reminds us of how much God desires that we just spend time with him. Sometimes when we talk about our prayer lives, we are concerned about if we are praying the right way or doing it properly, as though prayer were an exercise to be marked. We need to remember that we are relational beings. We are created to love and be loved. It is in our ability to relate that we most reflect God, and God's desire is that we relate to him.

Here is an exercise you might like to try: imagine yourself being with Jesus. At first you may want to spend only 5 to 10 minutes doing this, but if you feel like it, you could sit for a longer time, perhaps even up to an hour, just being with Jesus. Read each prompt below slowly, allow yourself time to ponder. If one seems more helpful than the others, then stay with that one. It may help to put an empty chair next to you and imagine Jesus sitting in it.

Some scriptural images may help you enter into this kind of prayer:

- 1 Kings 19:11-13 Elijah recognises the Lord in the gentle breeze
- Jeremiah 31:20 'Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him' says the Lord
- Psalm 18:19 God delights in me
- John 15:13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. Jesus offers me this depth of love

This very simple form of prayer is essentially imagining God looking at me, and noticing how God looks at me with love, perhaps like a mother who looks at her child.

Or I may feel God's love around me, like a cool breeze, a warm blanket, or I may imagine myself sunbathing in God's love.

Or I may sense a deep "knowing" that is difficult to express in words.

Or I may simply hear the quiet voice of God speaking to my heart.

Some theological points to bear in mind:

-We are always in the presence of God, and God is always attentive to us, but we are not always aware of God.

-All prayer is when we turn our attention towards God.

-God is always waiting for us, always inviting us. When we turn our attention to God, we are responding to God's pre-existing invitation.

**"The core of my being is drawn like a stone,
to the quiet depths of each moment,
where God awaits me with eternal longing."**

- Thomas Merton

My child, rest in the grace of the truth that you belong to me. You are my beloved!

- Imagine sitting with Jesus...
- Imagine him looking at you...
- What is the expression in his eyes?...
- Notice how you feel as he looks at you...
- What do you imagine he feels as he looks at you?...
- Is there anything you want to say to him, or ask him?...
- Is there anything he wants to say to you?...
- Imagine talking to him about what is going on in your life at the moment, what you are thinking about, worrying about, happy about...
- Listen as he responds to you...
- **Spend time resting in his loving gaze...**

At the end of the exercise, notice how you are feeling and contrast that with how you were feeling when you began. You may find it helpful to journal a few points about how you found this time of prayer.