

Things to Consider

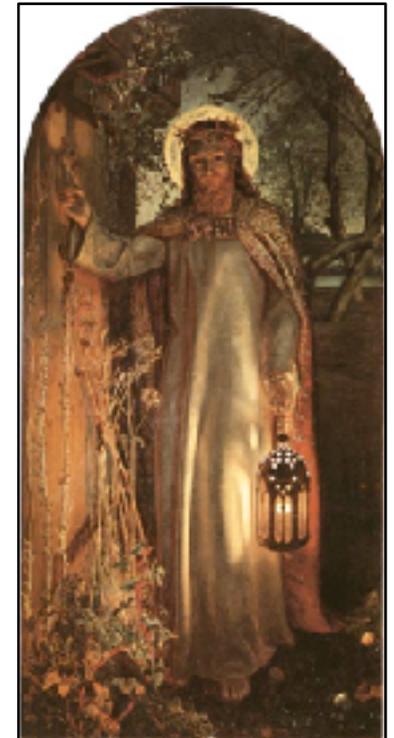
- ▶ Recall the Pentecost experience in the *Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 2 where the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples in a very powerful way. It was the beginning of being completely remade by the Spirit.
- ▶ You and I were given the gift of the Holy Spirit at our baptism. Each one of us needs to release the power of God's Spirit in our life. That can be a real struggle, for we don't like to relinquish control, but we do consciously need to give our life over to God. And that means being willing to take a risk even when we don't know where things will end up. It's being willing to 'ride God's wild wind'.
- ▶ We constantly need to ask God to unleash Himself in our life. And we also need to want this desperately, as a thirsty person wanting water. We must go on asking, never giving up. Each day, every day, throughout the day. Remember the parable of the widow and the unjust judge – she never gave up. (Luke 18.1-8)
- ▶ Parallel with this, we need to constantly look for opportunities to praise God each day. Focus on the wonder of God's love for you and His activity in your life. God is 'touching' your life all the time, but mostly we don't notice it unless those touches are glaringly obvious.
- ▶ As we step out in faith only two things are required. One is a penitent heart, a sense of real sorrow for our sins. The second thing is being bold, being willing to take a risk and constantly asking that the Holy Spirit, having been given you in baptism, be unleashed within you. Yes, it's risky stuff!
- ▶ Bede Griffith described it as being like a small child standing at a trapdoor. In a cellar below, the father stands urging the child to jump. The cellar is dark and frightening. The child knows the father will protect him, but there is much hesitation before the child finally lets go and leaps into the void, ultimately to be caught in loving arms. This is the leap of faith, the extreme vulnerability of trusting and surrendering to God.
- ▶ The prophet Isaiah wrote, 'I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God.' (61.10). Is that true of your life? We all struggle, but just take the first step and then the second and the third ...

AtG/B1/MBH



Attending to God

'A passion for God'



My wife and I were on holidays and arranged to join a guided day trip to visit some Aboriginal sites. The guide turned out to be non-Aboriginal, but did tell us the basic facts, and answered questions as asked. Later in conversation over lunch, we discovered that some years before, he had driven semi-trailers for a living. With great humour and many stories, he seemed to come alive as he recalled those days. Suddenly, there was a passion that had been lacking in his tour-guide duties. His passion lay with driving trucks, not with being a tour guide – and it showed!

Do you have a sense of passion for God? It can be very easy to focus on the externals of life and faith and yet never achieve any depth of soul, and never get beyond the superficial aspects of religion. We might know all about the Faith, be able to quote Scripture, tell why things are done in a certain way, and know the so-called ‘rules’, but somehow it has never penetrated into our depths. We feel no real enthusiasm. God is simply an external reality elsewhere.

George Montague, a biblical scholar with a Ph.D. in New Testament studies, tells how this was true of him. Despite his vast learning and by now middle-aged, he sensed there was something missing in his life. To try filling the gnawing emptiness within, he made a Cursillo Retreat. He found himself listening to blue-collar workers, who hadn’t even finished their schooling, speaking about Jesus as a personal experience in their lives and how it made such a difference to them, and that they had never been the same since. It was personal, it was exciting, it was powerful, and it was life-changing. And Montague wanted all this too, for it was a noticeably living and vital relationship these men had.

One of the Desert Fathers in the early Church, Abba Lot visited his elderly teacher, Abba Joseph, and told him with great passion that ‘to the best of my ability, Father, I have kept the Rule of our Order and performed the fast. I pray regularly. I meditate and practice contemplative silence. I strive to purify my heart of wicked and extraneous thoughts. What more can I do?’

Hearing this, Abba Joseph stood up, stretched out his arms, and caused his fingers to burst into ten lamps of flame. ‘Why not become totally changed into fire?’

Now we are talking about passion, about something more than a ‘head trip’. We are talking about our transformation in God. In the words of St Paul we are becoming ‘aglow with the Spirit’. (Romans 12.11) In the early Church the word used to describe this was *enthusiasm* in the sense that

the person was ‘filled with God’. You and I, as Christians, are to be filled with God.

This is the kind of relationship God wants to have with us. It has nothing to do with whether we are radical or conservative, extrovert or introvert, whether we are head or heart people. But obviously it is easier for some than for others to make this transition.

There are two pictures on the front of this brochure. One is of the gates at the Botanical Gardens in Adelaide. We have to choose to enter this place of wonder and delight by opening the gate. No-one else can do this for us. The second is William Holman Hunt’s ‘*The Light of the World*’. Jesus stands at the door of our soul and knocks. Notice, there is no handle on the door’s outside. It can only be opened from the inside; from our side. Jesus will not do for us what we need to and can do for ourselves.

It is very easy to allow our faith, our religion, to become a ‘head trip’ or for that matter to be simply focused on our feelings. As the Orthodox Church reminds us, we cannot simply operate out of our head, nor can we just operate from our heart. The two need to be in union with each other for it is here in this broad and deep place at the centre of our being that we encounter the living God.

So what can you and I do to encourage this passionate relationship?

The first thing is to really want a deep and intimate relationship with God. Thirsting for a deep relationship with Him is our most important first step (Psalm 42.1-2). Without that we will not get far. Think of it as when you thirst for water on a hot day and, as you quench that thirst, how satisfying it is. Might you feel this way with God?

The second thing is patience. It takes time. Perhaps, in beginning to learn a musical instrument, we want to skip the first few lessons and move to Lesson Five. But, patience – it requires one step at a time, constantly pushing the edges, but never giving up. And so it is with God and our developing relationship with Him.

How long will it take? Who knows! The Chinese bamboo tree is planted after the earth has been prepared and for the first four years all the growth is underground. The only thing visible above the ground is a little bulb and a small shoot coming out of it. Then in the fifth year, the bamboo tree grows up to 80 feet! So it is with us and God.