

Things to Consider

- ▶ I have previously written two Brochures titled *God the Great Lover* and *God's Sacred Dance ... please join!* and these complement this one.
- ▶ Recall those probably far off days when you first fell in love with a teenage boy or girl. You probably wanted to spend time alone with them and the presence of others seemed intrusive into the private world between you. Then, you probably wanted to know a little more about this other person – their likes and dislikes, how they spent their time, and so on. You learned to feel comfortable in their presence and sometimes you found yourself saying very little to each other. There were also the private jokes and stories that no one else knew. An intimacy was evolving that took time, sometimes getting it right and sometimes getting it wrong.
- ▶ Think about how you might begin to develop a relationship of intimacy with God, or, if one already exists, how you might deepen it.
- ▶ A first issue is finding space in your life on a daily basis where you can be alone with God without interruption from others and without background noise. For how long? Well, how long would you like to spend? Give yourself time; build up slowly; don't rush to be finished, and see how it goes. Isn't this what you did back in those halcyon days of youth?
- ▶ Take time getting to know Him. Reading the scriptures can be of great benefit in this, but don't do this while you are spending time talking with God. It would be like picking up a book and reading its contents to another person when really they want you to speak directly to them.
- ▶ Then, ask yourself, what would you like to say to God? What is it that stirs deep within your heart that you wish to speak to Him about? This may be pleasant or even painful. It is the same as happens in daily life in our other relationships.
- ▶ Now ask God what it is that He wishes to say to you. Take time to allow the answer to form in your heart – eventually, it will.
- ▶ Then give thanks to God, for your journey of intimacy with Him has begun, even if it is a struggle. With time and practice this intimacy will deepen and grow towards maturity.
- ▶ Try and do this each day. Allow a particular segment of time, but also try to take a few moments at other times during the day. After all, doesn't the lover speak to the beloved during the day? Eventually it will become an ever-ongoing dialogue between the two of you. And it will be quite natural.
- ▶ And always remember, it is God who initiates this, for He is always seeking us out, never giving up on us. We are reminded in Paul's Letter to the Romans that 'The love of God has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.' (5.5) Thanks be to God!

AtG/B2/MBH

Attending to God

The Language of the Heart – Intimacy



Eugene Peterson describes three kinds of language that we use. The first is the *language of intimacy*, the first language that we learn. These are the words spoken between a parent and the young child. The rules of grammar are ignored, very often the verbal content amounts to little, and the words used are basic and few. It has more to do with gurgles and facial expressions and perhaps, pet names. Much passes between the two and the content is rich with intimacy and trust.

The second is the *language of information*. Here we learn to name things and in a sense, by naming them, we gain some kind of control over them. It is the way in which we get to know our world and to feel at home in it. This is the language we use in school and at work. It is also the language of books and newspapers, as we try to make sense of our surroundings.

The third language, says Peterson, is the *language of motivation*. This is the power of words to make things happen. It may be the words and energy expressed by a motivational speaker who is trying to move an audience in new directions. Equally, it could be a company manager giving directions to his or her staff. Or again, it might be the cry of a small child or the words 'I'm going to be sick!' that will bring an immediate response from the parent. Small children learn this third language very quickly!

The second and third languages described are the dominant languages in our culture today. We use them every day and they are important in the fact that they enrich our lives in so many ways. We could not get by without them.

Our tragedy today is that our first language, that of intimacy, lies languishing. Apart from when speaking with the very young or in the early stages of falling in love, most people now do not use this language of intimacy. There are always exceptions, as Peterson says – some lovers, a handful of poets, and the saints.

The first, the *language of intimacy*, is the language of God. It is the language of love and prayer, says Peterson. It is the language of the heart, and our tragedy today is that we have mostly given up on it.

There is an important distinction to be made between *information* and *formation*. Our world is awash with information on many subjects, including God. There are thousands of books that tell us *about* God. This is important, but it is only ever the first step, for it simply involves my mind.

It is our formation in the Faith that is the key. This is the movement from the head to the heart. It is no longer simply knowledge about God, but more importantly, how it touches me and moves me towards Him. This is the language of intimacy, the language of love, and it is not anti-intellectual. Our minds are important and have an important role to play, just as they do in the intimacy and love between two people.

Think of that wonderful book in the Old Testament, the *Song of Songs*. Mystical writers have always seen this as a deep expression of intimacy between God and His lover seeking each other with great longing. Think too of some of the psalms where the writer has expressed a deep longing and searching for God.

Perhaps you know the truth of all this and are well on the way in your intimacy with God. Keep on going, never giving up! On the other hand, this might be an entirely new idea to you, something you have not thought about before, or at least not very much. Now is the time to start! See it as a sacred dance with God, with you joining the dance that is already happening in the Trinity. (There is another Brochure on this.)

Learn again the art of intimacy by recalling those teenage years when you first fell in love. Hold those thoughts and feelings and re-imagine some of your words. They may have been fumbling efforts, and in fact probably were, but I don't think your beloved minded too much. Equally, as you begin and learn this intimacy with God, struggling to find the right words and understanding your feelings, I don't think He will mind at all. In fact I think He will be delighted!