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Faith Today

Finding God in the whirl of the world

By Dolores Leckey
NC News Service

You, the reader of this article, very likely are an expert in the first art of balancing work in life, home life and leisure time.

Or perhaps you have refined your skills as a juggler — keeping tasks as a spouse, parent, parish minister, school aide and neighborhood representative going at once.

You probably are a busy person.

And the truth is, if you sometimes experience your life as a complex maze you're not alone. You're not alone either if, as a Christian, this complex maze sometimes poses a perplexing dilemma.

Inevitably, a point arises when conscientious Christians begin to examine the use of precious resources like time and energy. Can God really be found in the whirl of all these daily activities? Instead, should we be on our knees somewhere in solitary prayer?

This dilemma is not new. Apparently in the late Middle Ages, serious and devout lay people thought that the love of God would naturally lead the life of a monastery. The Dominican, Father Johann Tauler, one of the German mystics known as "The Friends of God," preached many stirring sermons about this dilemma. In one he recounted the story of a

farmer, someone who enjoyed a deep and steady relationship with Christ. But the farmer began to think that he should abandon his lay life and go to a monastery. Then Christ spoke to him and assured him that his love and service in the world were God's will for him.

Another time Father Tauler said that if he were not a priest but instead a shoemaker he would try to make shoes as best he could and he would count it a great privilege to earn his bread by the work of his hands.

Father Tauler, like others before and after him, pointed to the sacredness of all our work. The late Jesuit Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin put it this way in his book "The Divine Milieu": "God is at the tip of my pen or at the tip of my brush." This is what needs to be recognized.

Basically this recognition involves the kind of awareness we associate with contemplation. For the contemplative person is aware that God is found in all the ordinary events of daily life. In being attentive to home or friends or work, one praises God.

Centuries ago Brother Lawrence, a monastery cook, wrote about this ordinary contemplation in a small gem of a book, "The Practice of the Presence of God." The pots and pans of kitchen work served as reminders of God for him.

But, to say the least, most people don't come to this steady kind of awareness all at once. Like so many other things in life, it is a matter of practice. In learning over time to give ourselves and our attention to whatever task is at hand, we learn to give ourselves and our attention to God.

For Simone Weil, a 20th-century

French philosopher, prayer was defined by the word "attention." As we develop the capacity for singleminded attention, we stretch our capacity for God.

Contemplation demands placed on them to give attention to their work, their homes or civic commitments. However, there is something else to consider: the need for some form of outward service in society. For it is quite possible to become insulated from the poor and the needy people of our communities. This can mean overlooking the genuine opportunity for meeting Christ in others who are poor or whose human needs deserve attention.

This doesn't mean that people have no need to set time aside solely for God. The rhythm produced by movement from activity to rest and back into activity again are inherent in the world God has created. We women and men, residents of the earth, are meant to live in this kind of balanced way.

There is a need to pull back regularly from places of busy activity — whether in classrooms or courtrooms or social-action projects — in order to quiet this way of spending some quiet time with God energizes people.

Then they can move out again into the world. They are more alert to the possibility of discovering God in the world. And they are more attentive to the voice of God that may speak to them through the world.

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Time in the world. Time with God. Are these alien concepts? Dolores Leckey thinks not. She writes that we praise God by paying attention to our tasks in the world. And that we find God in the ordinary, sometimes hectic, days of our lives.

