

Editorial & Opinion

Discovering God's presence in life's normal experiences

By Bishop Matthew H. Clark

These have been 10 days of special grace and peace at Loyola House at Guelph, Ontario. As I sit here in the stillness of the lounge this evening, I am overwhelmed by the love of God and by the gracious and good things God has done for my heart these days.

I want to tell you something about this experience because I did ask for your prayers and because I know you are interested in what I am about. But I also want to tell you about it because I become more convinced as the years go by that it is important to share my journey of faith with you. That means trying to tell you something of my experience of God, of myself and of my sisters and brothers — about all of the things in me that cloud the search because they turn me away from the grace of God and toward the idols of my life.

What follows came from my pen after periods of prayer and reflection during those days. I wrote what was on my mind and in my heart at the moment, and have not edited them since. Let me offer to you these excerpts from my retreat journal, with the hope that something in my journey might somehow encourage you in your own.

December 31 — The first hour of prayer turned out to be wordless — because of sleep. I was a little surprised at that, but that's O.K. Take it as a gift from God who may know more about fatigue and the needs of the human person than I do.

I pray to walk in the light of Christ and in his light to be a light for others. Am mindful of the ways in which I have denied/fled the idea that I am called to be a light to the world — but am also deeply conscious, made so by the kindness of friends, that I am light for others.

I ask the Lord for a greater awareness of this and for the grace to experience/offer/absorb appropriate all things in His wonderful light. There is nothing, no one not touched by his light. Even when I am overwhelmed, uncertain, exhausted or sinful, Christ's light is there for me.

January 1 — Two things come back to me about my life: how normal it all was and how faithful God has been through it all. Embarrassment, confusion, shame, darkness, cupidity, retreat and withdrawal, fear — all are part of my human experience. They still are, but God is always present, and that awareness draws me away from darkness or leaves me with great peace even in the midst of it... I thank you, dear God, for the darkness

Along the Way



of life which in your providence and care turns me to you, because it helps me to know my radical inadequacy and weakness. Thank you for your strength in my weakness, your confidence in my uncertainty, your courage in my fear.

January 2 — I am sure that God is in all of life's experiences loving us and is ready to lead us on even when we've made a mess of things. I know that I look back and find the seeds of greatest growth in some of my darkest moments... It comes back to me again that when I try to be in touch with the hearts of the people, and when I try to share my own heart with them, that I and they are most alive... My fear of joyful things, peace, happiness has diminished considerably — at least the power of that fear is much less than it used to be...

January 3 — Feedback, affirmation, question. I know that as a human person I have a need for human support and community. In honesty, I must say that I have sinned in this matter not through demanding, extorting or manipulating support for myself, but by denying my need for it or by hiding my need when I was aware of it. I think that's true anyway. A dear friend has helped me understand this much better than I once did... This is all very long and self-centered. It all means to say that I want very much, like the Lord, to be selfless in ministry — but I am fooling myself if I think I can deny my humanity in pursuing that good. I am a man, not an angel, and I think I have hurt myself in the past by acting that way, even if it wasn't by conscious design.

This understanding comes most strongly in the realization that all those whom the Lord said had special claim in his ministry — the poor, the brokenhearted, the lonely — cannot be served in His name without a real solidarity with their humanity.

Come and see — an invitation to share the inner life

of Jesus and so to know his God. The call to each of us is personal, life-long and deep. I try to rest with that tonight, and cannot do much more.

January 4 — Anointing at Bethany — Jesus with three dear friends... It is a beautiful scene for its intimacy and affection, even though it is a prelude to the darkness of his passion hours. There is a lesson about life here — it unfolds. For most, it holds the good and the bad, the joyful and the sad. But in every moment there is the love of God for our heart's beat and for our care...

I anointed (ordained) Paul Dungan last week in a sign of Christ's love, but certainly of my own and of the community as well. Isn't that what we're about? — anointing one another with our love, setting people free to become themselves and to grow in Christ's love.

It was a great pleasure to remember the holiness I met at the ordination. Eileen and Greg and their 2-week-old Maureen; Roger, Bob, Bill, Keith, Lynn, Virginia, Ann; the novices; Mrs. Dungan and Peter. And so many others, like Paul's high school crowd, who also came to anoint him with their shared memories and affection. I am privileged to be present at times of anointing so often... I pray especially tonight to cherish each and every one of those moments and to bring to them whatever I may have that is loving, encouraging, hopeful or healing.

January 5 — I feel tired this afternoon — too long a walk after lunch. I came back against the wind and damn near froze to death! I thought I'd never warm up, and then I put on my SSND Holy Cross Sweat Suit. I feel normal again.

Have been sitting here since then remembering these good days, which have brought settling and peace, and a perspective to much that has happened this year. I remember especially the institute here in January and February, the Graced History Assembly, Convocation '87, Jubilee, Bob in his illness, Siena and Holy Cross...

January 7 — Have not taken up any particular texts this morning. Have just been trying to savor deep inside me the goodness of God as that has been poured out over me these days. Everything seems right! Not perfect, just right, and I have a sense of myself, which is healing, consoling and energizing. My prayer this morning is to pray that the memory will not leave me even in the difficult times that will surely be a part of my life as they are of everyone's. Peace to all.

Says differences teach patience

To the editor:

I had the opportunity to speak with a candidate who was elected in the November local election. This person was running on the Republican/Conservative ticket and to his disappointment, some of those whom he had hoped would be elected were not. During our conversation he said something to this effect: It will be difficult to accomplish what he hoped to, due to the conflicting interests of those of other persuasions whom he has to work with.

What he said stuck with me, and I was able to relate it to a similar situation — the seemingly conflicting ideas of orthodox and progressive members of the Church. Are we really at odds with each other, or are we just keeping one another balanced? I view (differences between these groups) as a safeguard, a mechanism to ensure that we dig into the real issues and not hastily try to resolve problems. It teaches us to have patience with one another. This constant challenging will cause some uneasiness, it may even cause some temporary discord, but in the end what will be good for the

Letters

Body of Christ will always prevail. We have Christ's word on it.

Here in America, it has been a fundamental practice when faced with conflict for those involved to compile facts, debate and present compromises so as to continue being a people who govern themselves. This has been very influential on how we are church in America. I would like to present a question to your readers: Is the Church in the United States built with its foundation in the Constitution or on Christ and His word?

Although, the two may work well together, this does not make them equal. The Gospel gives the directives on how are "to be Church" and the directives are delivered by Christ — appointed ones, not our elected ones.

For myself, I may not always accept the first word from the messenger of the Church, but I'm always moved to accept the last!

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Change denies Christ's perfection

To the editor:

Catholics accept that Christ prophesied. He foretold His own death and other things, even though He spoke in parables many times. Besides breaking tradition and/or canon law, I think the one thing that bothers me the most about the movement for ordaining women and "girl-altar boys" is the fact that it appears to be denying part of Christ's mission. His knowledge as the second Person of the Trinity, and also the omnipotence of God, His Father.

If we are to accept all that His death meant

and with all the good women wanting to serve Him and agonizing while He died — including the "perfect woman." His holy mother — and if we accept women as priests or altar boys, then aren't we saying He didn't know what He was doing at the first Mass — the Last Supper? Aren't we also saying that an all-perfect Creator let Him make a mistake by not having a woman participate?

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PEACE

... is a broken television set

