

COLUMNS COMMENTARY

Discovering God in our daily lives

By Patricia Schoelles, SSJ
Courier columnist

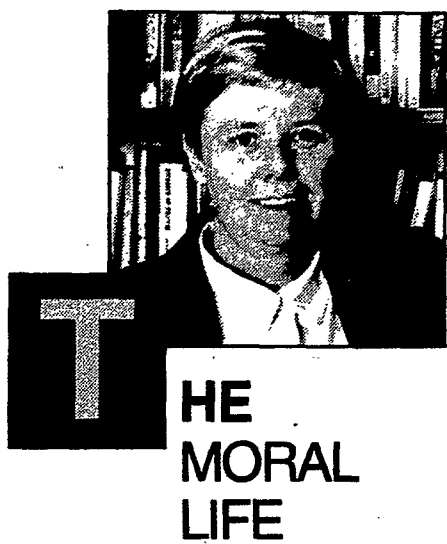
Everyday life offers us often overlooked opportunities for knowing God better and better. I think we make the mistake of thinking that it is only the time we spend in church, alone in prayer, or at Sunday liturgy that affords us the chance to meet and know God. Because we haven't been taught to expect insight into God in our ordinary daily lives, we miss important chances to uncover something of the divine right where we spend most of our time and energy.

Much of Catholic spirituality has associated the quest for seeking and "finding God" almost exclusively with the moments we spend alone thinking quietly and calmly about God in prayer or meditation.

It is surely true that those quiet times are important for every single one of us in our developing relationship with God. But by focussing on those moments only, we miss some of the ways we can meet God right in the chaos and busy-ness of our jobs, our family relationships, and even the fun and joy we know.

I learned something of this from a former student named Doug. Doug, a single parent raising two young sons, was a Methodist minister taking enrichment classes at the seminary where I was teaching.

As we chatted one morning before class, I observed to Doug that it must be difficult to get two kids up and out for school while trying to get to class.



In particular, I thought the task of packing lunches for the two children must have been a bit of a nuisance.

But Doug explained that packing the lunches was actually a special joy for him. He described his practice of writing a small note for each son every day, and tucking it away somewhere in the contents of each lunch. Then during his own morning hours, he would imagine the boys opening their lunches and finding the notes. He pictured the smiles on their faces, and all three took delight in the practice. After school, the boys would comment about the lunch notes, and they all enjoyed this remembrance of that day's luncheon literature.

After Doug finished describing this practice, he made a remark that has had considerable influence on me

ever since. He said, "You know, picturing those boys opening their lunch notes has made me understand something of what it must have been like for God, waiting for human beings to come along and discover the Finger Lakes. God must have waited all those years with such joy and anticipation, so eager to share all that beauty with us."

Doug's comment made me think about my own life and the many opportunities that could be the source of insight into God, and even knowledge of God. But because I haven't conditioned myself to look for God in ordinary experiences, don't even expect my ordinary life to be a source for meeting and knowing God. I think I expect God to "dawn on me" only when I am alone, in church, at prayer or worship. I simply don't look for God in ordinary daily events.

Doug's story helped me to see what a mistake this is. It made me regret that I simply haven't been looking for God in ALL the right places. Most of us don't spend a major part of our day in prayer or in quiet moments alone.

Our busy lifestyles can seem pretty hectic and even chaotic at times. We spend most of our time, talent, and energy at work, with our families, engaged in pursuits with others. It seems as if we are always trying to balance the many responsibilities that pull us in several directions at once.

If we have the impression that we can discover God only in quiet moments of prayer, all we can do is feel

guilty about the fact that we don't pray enough, or regret the fact that, unlike contemplative monks and nuns, we'll never have the chance to really get to know God.

Most of us do not have the luxury of changing our lifestyles — we already have a range of financial, family, and other commitments. We have to struggle for even a few moments of peace and quiet.

Instead of thinking we have no chance of encountering God, we might want to condition ourselves to look for God in the very midst of the busy-ness, struggle and confusion of our lives.

It's interesting to note that the Gospels do not include much information about the content of Jesus' prayer life. Instead, they offer us a record of Jesus in the midst of crowds pressing in on Him, people demanding solutions to their problems from Him, and Him busily engaged with other.

For sure, Jesus went apart to pray, and so must we all. But the greater proportion of His time seems to have been spent working out His relationship with God in the midst of His activities and encounters with others.

We would do well to spend less energy regretting the fact that we can't pray like monks do, and more energy trying to uncover something of God right in the midst of the real lives we are actually leading. As we know from our earliest catechisms, God really IS everywhere — and always ready to tell us more about Himself.

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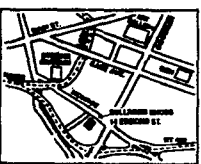
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Sister Rosemary St. Peter, Superior General
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