

Everywhere we are in the Presence of God

A Gospel Reflection from Brian Wigger

Wow! Talk about conflicts! Jesus keeps teaching us to love our neighbors as ourselves, love our enemies and do good to those who hate us. Now he says, "Hate your mother and father, your brother and sister, your wife and children, and even your own life." You cannot have it both ways; Love everybody and hate your family?

Jesus is inviting us to think it over seriously. Listen to Him: He knows well, to be disciples is unusually difficult. You must make a TOTAL commitment. Nobody, absolutely nothing, can come before me. I am your one Lord and God. In case of conflict, your nearest and dearest must take second place.

I would like to share with you what Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM has to say on taking the first step of discipleship: **recognize, acknowledge, accept** the truth that everywhere and at all times we are in the presence of God.

*"We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already totally in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness. Each time you take another breath, realize that God is choosing you again and again—and yet again. We have nothing to work up to or even learn. We do, however, need to **unlearn** somethings, and most especially we must let go of any thought that we have ever been separated from God.*

To become aware of God's presence in our lives, we have to accept what is often difficult. We have to accept that human culture is in a hypnotic trance. We are sleep walkers, as St. Paul says "seeing through a glass darkly." Wisdom teachers from many traditions have recognized that we human beings do not naturally see; we have to be taught how to see.

That's what religion is for, to help us let go of illusions and pretenses so we can be more and more present to watch actually is. That's why Buddha and Jesus both say with one voice, "Be awake." Jesus talks about 'staying watchful.' And the word, "Buddha" literally means "I am awake" in Sanskrit. Jesus says further, if your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light."

Father Richard Rohr continues on and says: "We have to learn to see what is already here. Such a simple directive is hard for us to understand. We want to attain some concrete information or achieve an improved morality or learn some behavior that will make us into superior beings. We have a merit badge mentality. We worship success. We believe that we get what we deserve, what we work hard for, and what we are worthy of. It hard for Western people to think

in any other way. But any expectation of merit or reward actually keeps us from the transformative experience called grace.

Experiencing radical grace is like living in a different world. It's not a world in which I labor to get God to notice me and like me. It's not a world in which I strive for spiritual success. Unfortunately, many good people are afraid of gratuity. Instead, we want God for the sake of social order, and we want religion for the sake of social controls. God cannot be seen through such a small and dirty lens."

Perhaps this week, we can check our spiritual spectacles, clean off any smudges and be open to receiving the radical graces God is waiting to hand us. We are reminded that we are to be prepared to accept that discipleship is something we can only commit to if we are prepared to put God before everything else. Jesus is asking us for TOTAL commitment.