



MERCY
GLOBAL
PRESENCE

Theological Imaginings: Presence of/with/to God

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Why are we focusing on *presence*?

When we use the word “presence” in a spiritual or religious context, we generally mean an experience of ultimate reality, or “God,” maybe through some experience of someone or something that serves to instill in us a greater sense of meaning. Maybe it recalibrates our attention in such a way that we discover increased meaning, hope or purpose, or we at least stop, pause, take notice of or savor an experience because it seems important. It may awaken in us a sense of awe and gratitude, simply or profoundly. -- We may have an experience of “presence of mind” whereby we or someone else attends to reality more respectfully and creatively.

Our experience of “presence” is for this world. Maybe it does hint at a hidden dimension or toward *something more*, yet when we experience “presence” it does feel hyper-real in the moment. It can invite us into a deeper now, as well as into future, maybe simultaneously, or maybe it takes us back to something we left behind too quickly. The experience of “presence” has a timelessness about it and a spaciousness that is both intimate and wide. It has elements of new and old.

I want to suggest that opening to the grace of presence involves three stages: vulnerability, revelation, and resiliency.

Reverent awareness of the depth of creation lives in the energetic play of vulnerability, revelation, and resiliency. The experience of presence speaks to an attentiveness to what is happening on many levels. It rides on the wings of life, alert to what is, open to emerging existence over the course of its long arching story.

Let us consider a conversation with a friend. – We meet and greet. We start with chit chat, then settle into a rhythm of back and forth dialogue, listening and sharing, reflecting together on current events and how each of us is moving through life during what can feel like an upside-down world.

Our defenses and walls come down gradually. Reverently we attend to each other’s story, curiously. We engage, raise questions, reflect, wonder, maybe laugh, maybe cry, maybe both. In this exploration and exchange we come to know each other and ourselves a bit more. Something bare, close to the bone, unarmed gives us pause. It seems like new territory. It was unexpected. What happens between us in these moments?

In the first stage, we surrender some part of our protective layer such that we expose something raw and unfinished about ourselves:

an event when I did not know what to do;

a disappointment when I felt rejected;

a moment when I got it wrong;

an experience with someone I wish I could do over;

a moment of appreciation and affirmation;

a day of delight when I tried something new and it worked;

a process of trial and error until things came together and this is what I learned.

Through this exchange we give over to the second stage, the grace of discovery and revelation. Surprise, something catches us off guard, we see anew, we are a part of ongoing creation, remarkably, works in progress that we are, yet ever still surrounded in mystery.

Yes, I am a mystery even to myself and I need the eyes of the other to help me explore the world and the landscape of my own soul, to see and feel and listen, to reflect on the soul of Spirit, of deep beauty, truth and goodness, and her presence and hiddenness in the world. Some degree of vulnerability is needed to open the door to awareness, to seeing, to listening, to the experience of presence or soul. In this kind of vulnerability, we experience some taste of the core of life, of what we call God or truth, or even love. It is resolute.

Vulnerability is not about emotionalism, false humility, attention grabbing behaviors, or a wet, mousy ego. What is implied is a humble willingness to be with one's own insufficiencies or incompleteness ("shadow"), and to sufferings and joys, disappointments and hopes, our own and those of others, and to be willing to reflect upon, examine, pray with and learn from these.

Ongoing revelation of Mystery continues but without these meaningful exchanges with others as well as with other kinds, like oceans and eagles, as well as solitary time, our lives would be lifeless. Presence is, foremost, about being willing to communicate, give and receive, from a place of authenticity, with and without words. A depth of truth is in this communication, revealing more than the communication itself can contain. -- The experience of presence is lightweight if we contemplate it as a noun. It demands ongoing listening and mature empathy.

Following vulnerability and revelation comes a third stage, resiliency. How do we enfold the experience of presence into our being? How does the experience shape us and the story that is unfolding and developing?

To return to my friend, how does that visit become part of us, how does it help habituate us toward the good, beautiful, and true, toward fairness and kindness, strength and compassion? Or, how does a walk in the forest and my experience of the presence of the holy in those trees do this? What surrounds us and binds us? How am I vulnerable to the trees? How do I experience their vulnerability? What is this exchange or encounter? What is revealed, continually? What evaporates, unable to hold forth, yet still perdures? What is resilient like a golden thread woven into the very fabric from beginning and through out? -- Prayer and meditation are practices, teaching us about presence.

Why are we focusing on “presence”?

I believe we choose to focus on PRESENCE because we are hungry for a greater experience of the Divine Mystery/Spirit/Meaning, both personally and collectively, among us and between us, in our everyday and in the world at large. This experience does not have to be loud and shocking but can be a knowing that is intimate and ongoing. It does not have to be rooted in ancient metaphysics but can comport with 21st century understandings of the world but with room for humility and mystery. Meaningful presence must be able to enter into the pain and hopes of many.

Some of our old rituals and patterns may not engage us like they used to. – Yet we have a desire for more of the mystery of holy presence, and a desire to be more of a vehicle for an awareness of the depth of this presence. — Zoom world, virtual reality, simulacra, will not suffice.

I cannot help but think that the experience of “presence” involves some degree of real vulnerability, our vulnerability, maybe God’s vulnerability, discovery or revelation, and a resiliency that enfolds this and carries on.

Link -- <https://youtu.be/-wL3sxCy9w>