

94 Crossing the Threshold

We all know that God is "omnipresent" - present everywhere - and hence it is impossible for us to be apart from Him, somehow beyond His presence, in any location or in any situation in our daily lives. This knowledge, of our being always in His presence, is in itself a huge comfort, and sometimes also a strong and helpful means of restraint in the moments of temptation which we can encounter along the way.

But inevitably, we are not always *consciously* in God's presence, because our attention is being given, quite understandably, to other things. So it is helpful, amidst our busy lives these days, to try to build in regular times of "pause" throughout a typical day, and to cross the threshold into the conscious presence of the Lord.

The monastic tradition was, and remains, very strong on these pauses in the daily routine. The bell was rung, tasks were stopped, the brethren gathered. Together, they regularly "crossed the threshold" from the many activities of the day into the conscious presence of the Lord, through the rhythms of liturgical prayer and song. They became still, quiet, and listening. They worshipped, prayed, learned, reflected, contemplated. And then that pause was over, and off they went once more to their different places and tasks. But because of that time of pause, all had been blessed - those for whom prayers had been lifted, the brethren themselves, and the Lord Himself, simply blessed by the loving worship of His people.

And so that rhythm continued at the heart of the community, like the steady ticking of a great old clock. Seasons and years, wars and monarchs, successes and failures, laughter and tears - all came and went in their due time, while that steady crossing of the threshold, that steady pattern of the pauses, quietly continued, come what may.

What a lovely reminder for us in our busyness these days! - that the rhythms and patterns of liturgy still have a precious place, if we will allow them. For the old prayers are so effective in lifting us over that threshold into the conscious presence of the Lord once more. They can pick us up and make us say what we should be saying, even when we ourselves are perhaps flat and weary! Even just voicing the Lord's Prayer helps our mind to pause from the tasks of the day, and to become inclined towards the Lord afresh.

Once "inside", over that threshold into our being consciously in the Lord's presence, we too can then stop, grow still, become quiet. We too can speak, and then - so much more precious - listen! We learn to allow the sounds of the world and the pressures of the day to settle back into their true perspective, as we rest in the Lord.

And then - enough, time to go: not from the presence of the Lord as such, but probably from the conscious presence of Him, until the next occasion when we can pause, cross that threshold, and consciously draw near to Him again.

We note that these pauses are not primarily about our Bible reading, which is a very different activity. Regular reading and study of the Word is vital, of course, for it is the Lord's main language, His main vocabulary, by which He speaks to us. It is a very odd Christian, and a very stunted one, who tries to grow in the Lord while not bothering to grow in the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures. But we do well to remember that our Bible reading on the one hand, and our crossing of that threshold to wait in the Lord's presence on the other, are two different spiritual activities. Each feeds off the other; each is precious, important, and deserving to have a regular place in our daily rhythms, but they are most effective if rarely mixed.

How often we are able to pause, and for how long, and where, and how each of us chooses to cross the threshold and to use the time therein - all of these will vary between us. But this habit of pause is a precious gift for us all, and for the Lord Himself, as He greets His people and communes with us, His redeemed children in Christ.

"Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46.10) still holds the key to so much spiritual blessing. It is always worth the effort.

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