

A Picture Speaks 1000 Words, Except When God is the Artist

REMBRANDT

The painting of “The Return of the Prodigal Son”

Rembrandt is known for the use of light in sharp contrast to the overall subdued, almost dark, shadowy colors otherwise employed. This is so very true of his magnificent masterpiece, “*The Return of the Prodigal Son*”. It’s based on what we learned as the Parable of the Prodigal Son or the Loving Father. (Lk. 15:11-32) This is the gospel we heard last Sunday (Sept. 16) and on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, Cycle C.

One would expect the father and the elder son to be highlighted. Rembrandt’s not your normal artist. To the right of the picture are two well dressed men, one who is almost hidden in the darkness. Between these men and the father and prodigal son is the elder son, shown hidden in total darkness except for the few rays of light that reach his face. Look hard or you’ll miss him, as you will two other characters, who in reprints of the masterpiece cannot be seen. The father, in dress that signifies his status, stands over the kneeling son, in an effort to embrace him, his hands on his back and shoulders.

The prodigal son, however, is seen in full light, tattered camel tone clothes brightly reflecting light.

What’s being said?

Throughout history God has painted a picture for all people to see and grow to appreciate. It is of a new creation, with all people as part of this massive work. You cannot count the faces seen, but must wonder how many people are missing, how many people haven chosen over the years not to be included in the painting of the Master, or are lost in darkness.

This painting created by God came to life in his word through centuries of revelation. We know it as the Old Testament. The final revelation came in and through Jesus Christ. What is painted in the New Testament — the gospels and the Epistles (letters) — is God’s work and God working, not in subdued colors, but in bright vibrant colors glowing in the light. Now, God is finishing the work, including all things created that have come to perfection in the One who perfected them, Jesus Christ.

Each of us is planned for this massive work.

Each of us is to be part of the story that the picture tells — of how we have been brought to perfection with all of creation through our choosing to live in the light, the presence of God.

Oh, that it would be that easy.



As [Fr.] Monk Maloy (CSC), the retired president of Notre Dame, said in a homily, “People are slow. They move slowly, they respond slowly, especially to God. But God is patient.

“God is painting the picture,

which some prefer to paint themselves. But it’s God’s story of revelation and salvation, and it takes time for people to become aware of this. We are called to understand ourselves in

GOD FIRST

Year Two, Part 4

The Prayer of Awareness



light of what God wants to tell us in the story, — to see ourselves perfected as God has it planned in the picture he is painting. People are slow in understanding this.

“We must be patient as God is patient with us. If we become one with God, the picture will be beautiful.”

In some ways we need to be like the subject of the painting — sitting still for the sake of the painter, and learning to be patient, just as the painter is patient.

You see, it takes a long time to read all the words of the bible. It takes only a minute to understand them if we really think about them.

The whole story was really spoken to Moses in two words: “I AM.” (Ex. 3:14) It was reiterated by our Lord, Jesus, as we hear in the Gospel of St. John : “I AM.” [See reverse side for scriptural references, and bulletin insert, Part 2 for additional insight.]

The remainder of the words tell how the I AM was constantly being revealed and understood and lived, right through the early Church. They are words that help us along the way in our own understanding of the presence of God always with us.

“I AM”, God, cannot be removed from the picture. We’d be in total darkness. God is the light

that gives our mortal nature immortal status in his own divine life. God is the light that allows us to see ourselves radiant in splendor, God's splendor. It is the forgiveness of God that enables us to walk as children of the light, seen anew in his image and likeness as we were at baptism when we took on his divine glory, won through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God is the Loving Father embracing the prodigal, lost, son (and daughter).

Even in our tattered life, God is embracing us with grace, his presence, his forgiveness, his love. He is joy-filled. As these gifts were always there for the prodigal son in the parable, so they are for us — always present.

As the son became aware of the father's presence and sought it out, so too do we in our prayer and practice of our awareness of the presence of God.

Our practice of praying the awareness of the presence of God is substantially aided when we allow ourselves to be bathed in the light of our God, shown to us by our Lord and Savior. Through reconciliation — even daily in our moment-to-moment existence, we become continuously aware of the love of God that makes new. We begin to joyfully examine our lives in light of God's presence and the immediate renewal we can again have.

Imagine, humbly acknowledging our sins while at the very same time having the feeling of being washed anew with a loving embrace — something we can't do, but God can.

The need for God's forgiveness is essential to our recognizing the presence of God and the love that is God in our lives. Otherwise we are constantly looking to those things in life that we think will provide us with happiness and completion. And we'll find ourselves like the elder son, never coming to know the loving Father.

The only promise that fulfills the inner self and provides an awareness of completeness within ourselves, is the promise of Jesus. "I will be with you always." It's a promise that is of God, and God alone, filled with joy.

Our individual practice of becoming aware of the presence of God in all of life also helps us see all of creation — every person — in new light, God's light, even if they choose not to see it that way.

Our praying the presence of God allows us to see ourselves included in the story of the Master who is painting a beautiful picture, of his own desire which has always included us.



Scriptural References that lead us to an awareness of the Presence of God, The "I AM"

Old Testament		New Testament	
Genesis	15:1 17:1	Matthew	16:15 28:20
Exodus	3:14	Mark	8:29
Psalms	16:11		14:62
Isaiah	41:10 43:3 43:15 44:6	John	6:35, 41, 51 8:12, 24, 28 8:58 9:5
Jeremiah	3:14 32:27		10:7, 9, 11 10:11, 36 11:25 13:19 14:6, 10 15:1, 5 18:5
		Acts	9:5 18:10
		Revelation	1:8, 17, 18 3:11 21:6 22:7 12-20



Tell Your Own Story

Daily reflecting on how God's presence has been recognized and acknowledged in life is important. We can't relive these moments, but we can use them as a source of inspiration. The easiest way is to keep a journal. The words can be many or few. But don't be afraid of what is spoken to the heart while in prayer — the good and the not-so-good are helpful in spiritual growth.



The journal becomes one of the "Wow!" factors in life. Growth in practicing and praying our awareness of the presence of God can readily be seen — or challenged. But it's never condemning. God speaks to us so we may continuously grow in our acceptance of what God wishes for us to embrace and live and become.

EXCELLENT READING:

The Return of the Prodigal Son, A Story of Homecoming
by Henri J.M. Nouwen
An Image Book published by Doubleday.
ISBN 0-385-47307-9

*Past inserts are available at the rectory office, or may be found on the parish website:
www.stjohnthebaptistparish.net*