

Up & Down Life Experiences: Meeting People, Meeting God?

The next time you're shopping in a department store with an escalator, ride those mechanical stairs a few times. The first time you ride them, do what you normally do when on these marvelous machines. It will obviously be a bit different if you're alone than if with a family member or friend. The next time, watch the other people.

Despite the close proximity of the people, is there conversation with strangers or only with friends and family members? And that close proximity? How close is close enough? One or two steps? Does it differ going up opposed to coming down? What's everyone doing?

Some will be stretching to see what may have been missed on the floor below. Others may be scanning what can be seen as you move to the top floor. Where are the sales? For the men, how fast can I get what I need and get out of here?

If we're with family members or friends, the conversation may continue all the way up or down. Or there may be that pleasant silence of just being with another person, where words are not necessary. Each time will differ to some degree. Is the silence caused by a greater concern for what you're looking for? Or is it simply that you've run out of words to verbalize for a while.

If we're shopping alone, the vast majority of the time there is little or no interaction with others, even as we share the same space. Our thoughts are our own, and usually remain that way. As with the above, what are our thoughts as we are in a state of nowhere, in between floors? Are we thinking about what is on the next floor or what we may have missed on the last floor?

This little exercise has a purpose. Today we celebrate the Baptism of the Lord. We celebrate John recognizing Jesus as "The One who is to come". We celebrate the bond that truly brings them together — not their kinship in human reality, although the acknowledgement of Jesus as fully human is important for all believers. We celebrate the absolute giving over of John and Jesus for the will and purpose of the Father.

We also celebrate our common sharing in the baptism of Christ, our Lord and God, and the life shared with us, first through his death and resurrection, but also in the baptism of spirit and fire. We celebrate the gift Jesus shows us in all people being rooted in the same life — that of God the creator of all. That is our first common link to each other, but a extremely important one, since without God we can do nothing.

What's this got to do with escalators?

Consider all those people we discussed while going

from floor to floor on those metal grates. We have oneness with them because of God's presence in and with us. Some of them we speak with, others we observe, some we make comment of, and in response to some, we simply shake our heads in disbelief.

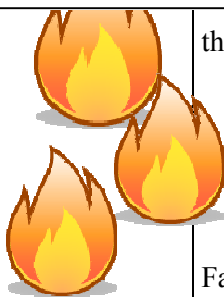
It is not that we meet people and then meet God by some chance. No, we really meet people in God. William H. Shannon in his book, *Silence On Fire*, devotes an entire chapter to meeting God and meeting people. It is our awareness that God — as Thomas Merton says, is "*the Hidden Ground of Love*." We all are rooted, have life, in God. Our "being" is the realization that we are sharing time and



GOD FIRST

Year Two, Part 20

The Prayer of Awareness



space and life with God, and with all of God's creation — with the escalator people.

This is our starting point. The escalator ride is a microcosm of the whole of life. And our response to

the many, varied people on the escalator is our response to God and reflects how well we are finding God's presence in our words and actions.

Our awareness of God through the grace of baptism moves us into living this awareness, this life. This is most critical for us who desire a stronger spiritual formation, one that mirrors the acceptance of the Father's plan and purpose in our lives as did John the Baptist, and most importantly Jesus Christ. It intimately joins us with one another, without exception. They are times of silence and times of verbal sharing in prayers we've used throughout life. How we respond in our awareness to the presence of God indicates if the presence God is moving us to prayer, or if the varied and many prayers are pulling us to a certain awareness.

During this semester, we are going to develop a look at how we engage life with an awareness of the presence of God in our hearts and lives. We will ask the critical questions, and then discern our lived-out response, realized in our words and actions. Does my life reflect my oneness with my God?; my desire to will God's will?

You see, if we are truly seeking the presence of God and are truly growing in an awareness of this presence, then we are going to notice a change in how we see life and respond to life. Our responses will reflect our awareness of God's presence. But more importantly, they will show us taking on the very presence of God in fulfilling the Father's will. And we will begin to see what is spoken of in St. John's gospel, and in his letters — that this all leads to us being perfected by God — God's will.