

God is Present
A Memoir by Sister Adele



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Growing Up and God

When I was growing up, I felt that God was more remote in the sense that you didn't know who He was or if He was there. I don't think there was an emphasis on the goodness of God. It was more that He created you. You're in this world, and you have free will. If you were good you were going to heaven and if you were bad, you were going to Hell. As we're growing up, it was more of a structural thing than a relational thing. In other words, your prayer was not from the heart, but it was the reciting of the "Our Father" or the "Hail Mary" and so on. I didn't have any adverse feelings about that. I accepted Confirmation and all that, but it was more catechistic. It was what they were teaching me, and so I don't think it was as personal.

God and Uncertainty

There were times when I was a novice and was tempted to go home. I didn't know if this was the life for me or not. Our mistress told me that that was perfectly natural. I took her word and stuck with it. I don't think I was what you called genuinely happy, but I wasn't sad either. I didn't feel like, "God called you, and this is what you have to be." I think I had this mindset of, "If I leave what will happen to me? I'm not doing what God wants me to do." Well personally, I don't think that is what a vocation is. You don't get scared and stay there because you think you have to stay there. God only wants giving service and that comes from your heart, not because you feel you have to. I thought I was staying because I thought that is where God wanted me to be. If I didn't, something would happen to me. I remember lying in bed one night and tossing around thinking about this. I said, "You don't stay because you feel you have to stay. You stay because you want to stay." He never wants you to feel that way. That was a turning point for me.

I have a prayer that I say every day thanking God for the gifts people have, your gifts and my gifts. I finally come to the conclusion, "I am me. This is what I can do. I am who I am." I come to that point. As you're pondering this, God becomes more meaningful to you. It's not like He's up there now and you're just serving Him. You begin to build a relationship. Every morning as I pray, I thank God for the call to ministry. I feel that he took me by the hand along this road where people helped me and advised me. So I just feel that's the path I took that very much helped me. That's when God becomes more personal to you, but it takes a while to realize that.

Experience of God

As far as who God is, I can say that when I traveled through the US during my sabbatical, that for me was a spiritual experience. I looked at all this beauty—I looked at the prairies and the mountains and it was telling me that God is present. I don't know how people can witness nature and not appreciate the fact that there is a God who's responsible for all that. I don't think

we take enough time to ponder that. I was reading about the Little Flower, my patron saint, and she said that the beauty of nature was a big help to her. I know what she was talking about.

Your relationship with God is an awareness of His work, but that only comes through experiencing life. That relationship, that grows. Just like how you looked at your parents when you were a child. Now, you look at them and you appreciate them. You begin to see them from a different perspective.

Holy Spirit

It's hard to think of God as a Trinity. It's the relationship with God: the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In other words, it's the same God. It's one God. When I go to Mass everyday and I take Communion, I feel very close to God the Son. He gave Himself for us, a nourishment for us. Of course that becomes more evident as you get older. You know when you're little, you hear about the Holy Spirit and the pledge of the Holy Spirit. I know when I was a regional superior and I had to go around meeting with different sisters, the Holy Spirit was very evident to me. I was saying things I normally wouldn't be saying. You try determining what to do, pondering it and of course the Holy Spirit is there helping you, but you don't realize it, and you come to a kind of sensible solution. It becomes very real.

Evil in the world

I really feel the presence of evil in the world, and there's plenty of it. I just cringe at what the children see. They'll be going down the street and wondering whether they'll be shot or not shot, not by stranger, but by people they know. To me, it's unbelievable. I just cannot believe we've gotten to that. I don't feel disconnected from God because I felt many evils are brought by people's own actions. I can't explain disease, that's just part of nature. God created free will. We're the only creatures that have this. I think that free will came at a cost.

Heaven

I think of the reality of God, and I think, "Do I really know?" I honestly feel this way. I know that my interaction is relational. When I die, what will reality be for me? What will heaven be like? I've heard talks by others who had different visions. This one sister came to talk to us. She said that we go from one life to another life. I believe that. This body will disintegrate, but our spirit goes on. She said, "We go into another existence of life." What is it? I don't know. I'm not bothered by it because I know God has plans, and it will be good.

I think I had an advantage when I was growing up. My mother, she was very canonistic. But my father was a convert. He didn't have that rigidity. In school we learned that unless you're baptized, you weren't going to heaven. I'm always grateful my father came from a Protestant background because I couldn't think of my relatives being unworthy of going to heaven. I couldn't think that way. That was a thing I couldn't grasp. So I kind of grew up with tolerance, if that's what you want to call it, tolerance of people's faith. I don't care what you are, whatever it is. The point is you believe in your God. That's important.