

Learning to be present

The last time I wrote in this column I talked about going with the flow and how much it had improved the quality of my life. That is still true. However, during this Lenten season, God is teaching me more about going with the flow. I'm realizing that going with the flow requires being present.

I've heard that term many times in my walk as a Catholic but never really understood what it meant. In fact, the term used to annoy me. I've heard it said many times that Jesus is "present" to us in the Eucharist, that the "real presence" is in the Eucharist, that we must be "present" to one another. But what does that mean?

God is truly patient with someone like me, so slow to grasp His truths. It began to dawn on me that being present is similar to living in the moment. That term is a familiar one in the worldly sense - how many times have we heard the phrases "live for now" or "live in the moment?" Especially when an advertiser wants to sell you something: buy it now, pay later, no interest until 2010!. Somehow I don't think being present means that, but in my dim mind, I began to realize its true meaning.

Being present to me means being totally focused on the moment you are in. You are not thinking about what happened yesterday or even five minutes ago, and you're not worrying about tomorrow. You're simply here. Now. And how does that play out in everyday life?

I began to find that being present meant listening to people when they talk to you. Really listening. That means I'm not watching TV or reading my email while talking to someone on the phone. I'm not making plans for the next day or worrying about what I'm going to be doing in the next hour while

talking to a family member or friend. Instead, I am blocking all those distractions out, and just being with that family member or friend.

It's such a simple thing, but it is incredibly hard to do in a world where the tendency is to multi-task all the time, even when you'd greatly prefer doing things one at a time.

However, grace is a wonderful thing, and God is more than willing to bestow it if you're just willing to give it a try.

Now that I am aware of what it means to be truly present to someone, I find that I have a lot more patience with family members who truly tried my patience. In fact, I find I even enjoy being with them more! I've discovered that my sense of compassion, which at times seemed very shallow, has suddenly grown deeper.

At the time I was learning this I had received Danielle Rose's latest album, *I Thirst* (see review on page 25). There were two songs on that album that spoke to me regarding this lesson I was learning about being present. One was called "You Did It to Me" which is based on Matthew 25:45 ("Truly I say to you whatever you did unto one of the least, you did it to Me."). The other, "Small Things with Great Love," based upon the saying of Blessed Mother Teresa, really struck home: "I can do small things, small things with great love, and make my life something beautiful for God."

I suddenly realized what both of these sayings meant and how they applied to being present: the greatest work you could do for God is in the present moment, being completely available to someone, completely focusing on their needs. So if my elderly mother needed to talk and perhaps complain, I could sit by and quietly listen and offer comfort with



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a smile on my face to conveying kindness in my voice. And I would do that without watching the TV or browsing on the internet to keep myself 'entertained.' If my husband was running late in the morning for the office (even though it was his fault), I could make his lunch for him and be cheerful about it, even if it interfered with my own routine.

There is an episode on *That Catholic Show* that illustrated this point beautifully (see article on page 13 and review on page 26). To quote from the review, "in the Charity & Mercy episode, host Jennifer Willits demonstrates in practical ways how charity and mercy can be practiced in our own families through the simple means of cooking meals, doing laundry and being kind to one another, and how these acts are equal in greatness to the acts of the great saints."

That's what being present means to me.

I am so grateful to the Lord for having the opportunity to listen to CDs and watch DVDs that teach the faith so well. And I long that others will take advantage of these resources as well. Perhaps 2008 will be the year that Catholics discover all this great music and media that is available to them. 2008 has certainly started off with a bang and there is a lot of buzz in the air about Catholic music. We all need to be present, paying attention to what is going on and being ready to share these treasures with friend and stranger alike. †