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"Come away by yourselves to a quiet place and rest awhile!..." Mark 6:31
Are you ready to accept the invitation?

PRESENCE!

I see him regularly on business. And although the setting is often busy and noisy, with others coming and going, his presence to me is almost unfailingly full and focused, something which I acknowledge with appreciation. His quality of presence, so unusual in a world in which we praise (and likely practice) multi-tasking, got me to thinking.

Can you remember a time when all you wanted – perhaps desperately needed – from another was that person's full, one hundred percent, attentive presence – and you got it? Such moments are indeed memorable, precious, perhaps even life-changing. They are the moments that bind together spouses, parents and children, lovers and friends, and that bear them through all the other, less wonderful moments of daily life.

Now: Can you remember a time when all you wanted – and perhaps desperately needed – from another was that person's full, one-hundred percent, attentive presence – and you did not get it? Such moments are also memorable, but for very different reasons. What is remembered is the pain, the loss, the what-might-have-been. Such moments are wounds that ache to be healed. And relationships marked by such moments are left wounded and weakened.

Perhaps the opposite of full, attentive presence is when you are treated as a distraction, or simply ignored. That may happen in the store, when the clerk is harried by multiple customers just at closing time; or on the job, when the colleague is juggling phone calls, clients, tasks and appointments. Such moments are understandable, if not enjoyable. Expectations are lower; and your patient presence is a valuable tool then! Distracted presence, however, is not good business. And if you begin to feel as though you are being treated more as a distraction than a customer, you may decide to take your business elsewhere!

It is one thing to be treated as a distraction in the outer world. It is quite another when that treatment is occurring in the context of friendship or family. Expectations are higher there, and rightly so. The quality of presence we bring to one another is the first

sign of love, the first indication that we are here, in loving and attentive presence, to and for one another.

That is the kind of presence God gives to us: full, attentive, one hundred percent – and very real.

Did you ever hear someone begin a period of prayer by saying (or perhaps you have said it yourself), “Now place yourself in the presence of God”? Have you ever wondered where you were a moment ago? Because of course, the truth is that we are always in the presence of God. There is no existence outside of the presence of God; if somehow we could manage to be outside of the presence of God, we would not exist. That does not mean we are always supposed to be thinking about God; it does mean that God is always thinking about us – and isn’t that a wonderful thought! So prayer does not begin by somehow placing ourselves in the presence of God, as if we were not already there. But perhaps prayer begins whenever we remember that we are always and already in the presence of God – and that presence is full, attentive, one hundred percent.

Perhaps the real danger of distractions in prayer is to treat ourselves as a distraction, to think that somehow we have to get God’s attention away from whatever else God may be doing at the moment. When parents are at their best, their children are never treated as distractions. God is always at God’s best; and so we, sons and daughters, are never distractions. God’s presence to us is all we could hope for, and more.

We may pride ourselves on our ability to multi-task, even think that it is an essential skill in a demanding world – although recent research has shown that even accomplished multi-taskers actually end up doing several things poorly, and all at the same time! One thing is certain: Our practice of multi-tasking is the polar opposite of, and perhaps an impediment to, full and attentive presence.

Undivided, attentive presence is where love begins – for you, and for God. It deserves some practice.