

Be awake to the divine presence

Have you ever had an experience that was so amazing that you were lost for words? Surveys indicate that many people have some type of mystical experience, but don't know what to do with it. They're afraid to tell others for fear that they will not be believed, or worse, be dismissed or ridiculed. So they keep it to themselves.

I'm fortunate in that others seem to trust me with their secrets. One of the great gifts of priesthood is that when we minister from the heart of Christ, others trust us with their hearts. So allow me to share one person's experience. This happened to him many years ago when he was a young man. He never forgot it. He was kind enough to write it out for me. I'll offer an edited and condensed version.

He writes: After meditating on the mysteries of the rosary with my eyes closed for about two hours, I opened my eyes and noticed that I was surrounded by this light. The light not only surrounded me but it was within me and I in it, and all of nature including the sky, the ground, the rocks, the trees and the water. Everything was contained in this light and the light was contained in everything, including myself.

I stood there awestruck, just pondering it. The light was pure love. I felt like I was in heaven and heaven was in me. It reminded me of our Lord's words that the kingdom of heaven is within you. During that brief moment I understood that without this light nothing was or is or can be. The words God spoke to Moses came to my mind: "I am who am." I remember asking myself if this is the Holy Spirit and is He the one who keeps all things together?

To try to explain how everything around me was in me and me in it is impossible. But during that time I had no fear of anything, as if I was given this gift to understand that no matter where I am this light is there also, and I should never fear anything.

Then, just as the light was fading, a rush of visions poured through my mind, as if I was given understanding of the Bible and much of the mysteries and their meaning.

I saw how when Adam and Eve sinned all creation was brought low and that the flood of Noah was creation's baptism to redeem it. Just as human beings need the sacraments to bring them back from the fall so does creation receive the same.

All of this happened in a flash.

An amazing story, isn't it? If you saw the man who had this experience, he might be changing a light bulb, or fixing a pipe, or strumming a guitar. He's just an "average guy" who an amazing experience. God is around all of us all the time, trying to break into our lives. Often we are distracted by something other than God.

People often ask: Why pray the rosary? Why pray the psalms? Why go to Church? Why have a spiritual practice?

Let me close by answering those questions with another story. A young man asked his spiritual director: "If I do all these exercises, will it guarantee enlightenment?" The director replied: "No!" "Then why do them?" the young man asked. His director replied: "So that you will be awake when enlightenment happens!"

May we all be awake and open to that divine presence.