

Prayer, meditation can help still a negative mind

The human mind has been referred to as a recording and playback machine. Sometimes I wish it didn't record and play back certain things. What am I talking about?

Well, on Alumni Day at St. Mary's Seminary in Roland Park this past October, one of the first people I ran into was Father Ed Griswold. Suddenly into my mind popped "Tullahoma, Tenn." Way back in 1968 or 1969, while we were all students at the seminary, an ad appeared from a pastor requesting seminarians to come to Tennessee to help run a Summer Bible School.

Now, to say that I had lived a humble life up until that moment, is an understatement. So the idea of going to Tullahoma was probably the equivalent to someone else going to Venice, Italy. Known for its historic beauty, the old line went: "See Venice and die." Having seen Venice, you would know that you would never see anything quite as beautiful. (Many decades ago, as an aside, I recall that there was a strike by the sanitation workers in Venice. With garbage piling up in the streets and floating in the canals, a travel agent said: "If you see Venice now, you might die!" But that was a long time ago.)

So three idealistic seminarians, Jim Redding, Ed Griswold, and I went to Tullahoma. I remember almost nothing of what we did that week, although I'm sure thousands of souls were saved for Christ (or at least a few kids learned a few Bible stories). Whatever.

What I do remember, however, is that there were a few very attractive young women who helped us with the Bible school. This is where the recording began in my mind.

One day, while doing something or other, I overheard the young ladies talking to each other. The conversation went something like this: "Oh, Ed is just so handsome!" Another girl replied: "And Jim is so cute." Then there was a long pause as I held my breath. Then, finally, another young lady said: "Joe looks like a priest!"

Now let's just say that this was not exactly my fantasy of what women would say about me! I had no desire to be an occasion of sin for anyone, but couldn't I be at least a temptation? So, a sadder and a wiser man, I returned to Baltimore at the end of the two weeks.

Now, what triggered my mind to play back that scene from over 40 years ago? I don't know. But as I have said before, and as I say so often in counseling, the mind is not our friend. The mind feeds on negativity.

In grade school, the good Sisters used to say, "An idle mind is the devil's workshop." I would say that the mind in general is the devil's workshop. The mind wants us to focus on sad memories from the past, negative thoughts in the present, and things that might go wrong in the future!

Meditation and prayer help us to still the negative mind, and to listen, instead, to the voice of Christ within us. The voice of Christ is the voice of compassion, of joy, of peace, and of love. All good things and thoughts come from God.

People will think and say and believe what they choose to think and say and believe. We have no control over that, and the less we concern ourselves with that, the happier we will be. All the love and joy and peace in the universe is right inside us. When we seek love and approval outside ourselves we doom ourselves to misery because people can withdraw their approval, and change their minds, at any time. However, when we trust the voice of Christ within us, we find a peace the world cannot give. Jesus told us that the kingdom of God is within us. One day, after having looked everywhere else, we will finally look within, and find it where it always was.