

Should I decide to risk meeting God, what would happen? If I were to say to God, 'Here's everything!' what would be the outcome? Let us refer to Mark 1: 16-18:

"As he was walking by the Lake of Galilee he saw Simon and Simon's brother Andrew casting a net in the lake, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Come after me and I will make you fishers of people.' And at once they left their nets and followed him."

Note that Jesus saw Simon. I would like us to keep that verb to see before our minds for our reflection. We are told by Andre de Lubac that "a person is enlightened not with a new idea but when one looks into his or her soul". I had an extraordinary experience of this at the end of last year, when I was in India. On a visit to Shillong I called into the Centre for the Handicapped and the Disabled, where our novices work. While we were having tea, we mingled freely with the blind and deaf, children and teenagers. They were warm and friendly, very much at home with us. I remember in particular one of the blind girls to whom I was introduced. On hearing my voice she turned towards me. Then I felt her look deeply into my eyes and with the most gorgeous smile I had ever seen, she held out her hand towards me and said, "Good evening, Brother!" Suddenly the thought flashed into my head, "Who is blind?" I felt an extraordinary surge of recognition when she used the word, 'Brother.' The inflection of her voice when she used that term gave me a whole new dimension of what being 'brother' was. I knew at that moment what it is to be brother and I felt so proud to be a brother to her and to people like her. Then the confident way in which she held my hand showed absolute trust. She looked into my soul and I got an idea of the nature of my call in a way that I never had it before. So when I am told that a person is enlightened when someone looks into his or her soul, I know in the flesh and blood of my body what that means. I was enlightened that day.

Let us refer now to our passage from Mark. We note that Jesus sees the two brothers and then he calls them. What is it to live in the awareness that you are constantly in God's eyes? Aware of the providential presence of the Father in his life, Edmund Rice was moved by the Holy Spirit. The person who is aware of the presence of God in his life is the mystic. His journey is fully and consciously under the gaze of God. What a gift! Am I fully and consciously aware of the gaze of God?

As well as the image of the presence of God with him in the darkness of his prison cell, John of the Cross has another lovely image. He asks you to imagine yourself sitting on a bench in a park. You take out a pad and begin to jot down a few notes. You are engrossed in what you are doing when all

of a sudden you become aware out of the corner of your eye of someone who is watching you. You look up then and find that there is someone there. So you get up, move away and some time later you return to your bench. Again you notice the same person still watching you. Now you are conscious of the fact that you are an object of interest to someone else. The conviction deepens that you have become a factor in someone's life and heart. That is what happens between us and God. This awareness of God's presence makes us feel noticed. It gives us a dignity and allows us to feel that we are someone in God's eyes.

In Education the Christian Brothers tried to do just that, to make people feel noticed. I have read somewhere that when God looks at us, that gaze cleanses us and makes us beautiful. It enriches and enlightens us. In fact it is no different from the gaze of a lover, because when God looks at me and I am aware that his gaze is fixed on me in love, I am also aware that I am of worth. My sins do not matter to God. That embarrasses me, but it does not embarrass God. After a while, if I allow God's love to wash over me, I begin to see the good aspects of my life. So I am cleansed of guilt. When a boy loves a girl, she feels good and beautiful. Self-worth does that to us - it makes us feel good. When we feel good, we look good. Feeling good enriches us and adds a whole new dimension to our lives. It enlightens us, so that we understand what love is. We understand something about ourselves that we never knew before. So I ask you to sit in the gaze of God. Sit quietly in your room with your eyes closed and your hands outstretched. Feel God's loving gaze on you. Know in yourself that God's gaze is transforming you - love changes us.

Let us return and observe Jesus stop when he sees Simon and his brother, Andrew. He looks at them and then he calls them. We remember another occasion in the Gospel when he is speaking to a young man, who had observed all the commandments from his youth. "*Jesus looked at him and he loved him.*" The same thing happens when he looks at Simon and Andrew. He likes what he sees and he calls them. Then he offers them a very strange mission - to make them fishers of people. We remember that to catch fish and to take them out of the water is not to save them. In other words, Jesus is inviting the brothers to turn people's lives upside down. In order to be his disciples they have got to change values. There will be a whole reversal of values when people's lives are turned upside down. I ask myself how many lives have I turned upside down - in the Gospel sense, not in any other sense. If that is the measure of discipleship, I am not going to be a comfortable person to be with, because I will make people uncomfortable about their way of living. That is what Jesus is calling them to. Looking at people and loving them is always to call them out of themselves to something different. If I am ready to say to God, "Take everything!" God will look at me and love me. That love of God will change my soul. If I allow it, it will change and bring about in me a new

way of living. Colm Keating always said to us that Jesus came to tell people that life could be lived differently, that human relations could be different and that life's ends need not be those that society advocates. These two, Simon and Andrew, left their nets and followed Jesus.

Brothers, life will remain dispersed, scattered unless we bring God to the centre. When God is at the centre, I am aware all the time that God is active in my life. It is a practice, a habit, constantly to move aside and allow God's presence to be noticed. Silence is a help. Silence is not merely keeping quiet. It is something deep within me. I can meet and talk to a crowd of people but there is silence inside. I keep my centre and hold that centre. When we speak about being silent during a retreat, it is to develop that interior silence. Through it I am aware that God is around, that God is within me, calling out to me. I need that silence after moments of prayer because God is not limited to my prayer time. God may speak to us at any time during these days and we are here specifically to listen for God. We do not listen to God, as we would to someone who is talking to us. For me listening for God implies that although I am not sure if God is saying anything, my antennae are up. In case God says something, I am ready to pick it up. Listening for is also listening on behalf of God to what our brothers and sisters are saying to us. This does not apply to these days only. If I do not develop the practice of listening for God during these days of retreat, the chances are that I will not be able to develop it later on when life will be much busier for me. So I want to say to you, Brothers, as I constantly remind myself, that this call did not happen some fifty years ago. It is happening today. God did not look at me fifty years ago and then close his eyes. Am I conscious of the fact that God is looking at me now? God is calling me today. I ask myself what is he inviting me to? That is why I am a religious brother. No matter how young or how old I am I will always be a religious brother. I cannot retire from this. That is what I am - a listener for God, a listener on behalf of God.

As you go off to your prayer, Brothers, there are some questions you may like to look at. Be aware, while you are praying and while you are silent, of what is happening within you and leave yourself open to what God is doing.

What does God see when he looks at me?

When I look at the Brothers in my community, how do I see them?

How does God see them?

When was I last aware of God looking at and moving me?