Loneliness

Loneliness differs from solitude only in this; it is not sought. The word loneliness does not occur in the Bible, and the word lonely occurs only three times, and never in any significant context. Loneliness connotes an unmet need or desire, and is thus more akin to anxiety. As St. Augustine said, "My heart is restless, Oh Lord, until it rests in Thee."

Perhaps the true depth of loneliness can best be sensed after the loss of a loving spouse of many years. One can then at the same time be elated that the lost spouse has gone to a far better life, and yet be overwhelmed by a sense of deep and irreplaceable personal loss.

There is only one cure for loneliness - reaching out. One might easily conjecture that all creation is the outgrowth of God's loneliness, and it is interesting that having created man, the Lord then said, "It is not good that the man should be alone." One might even suppose that the Trinity is the epiphany of God's loneliness. After all, God is love, and the essence of love is the unrelenting non-contingent giving of self, a constant reaching out to the "other." It is in the nature of love to want to share the bad as well as the good. Thus, at weddings we say: "In sickness and in health."

Everyone is born alone, as perhaps every baby's initial cry testifies. And ultimately everyone dies alone — priest, doctor and loved ones standing by helplessly. It is true that two may become one flesh: as when bodies are joined together in the creative act. But no two minds can ever be joined. No one can read anyone else's thoughts fluently. No one is ever aware of our most intimate private thoughts. It might be said that loneliness is a byproduct of our individual free will, which necessarily entails an independent spirit, and we can only overcome loneliness by surrendering our will in favor of another's will - ultimately, surrendering to the will of God. "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Mt 18:3).

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