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"Nothing"

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“Nothing”

Something is always happening, though we might think and believe that in some of our experiences nothing has taken place. A bit of careful reflection will enable us to recognize and identify, at least to some degree, whatever has actually occurred during the time-frame under consideration. For example, one of us might have been looking out a window with no particular purpose or intention in mind, and say of the experience that “nothing happened.” We might mean that nothing caught our attention, or that we had no memorable thoughts or feelings while we were at the window. But after reflection we might recognize that we had a quiet sense of contentment, or even a now-welcomed appreciation for a respite from prior intense concentration. Something of relevance has indeed taken place, but could easily have been missed.

Reflecting upon experience is not an exercise in fantasy, as if we attempt to make a loaf of bread rise without yeast or baking powder. Rather, we allow inspiration, often assisted by memory and imagination, to make available to our consciousness some parts of a larger reality than we were aware of at the time. We do not add something that was not there, but we recognize a part of reality which is like reading a truly informative text only after we have viewed the cover letter.

“Nothing” is a common complaint for what sometimes occurs when people are experimenting with prayer or other spiritual experiences. We are accustomed to accomplishing something when we engage in physical exercise or when we occupy ourselves with study, planning or any activity. We might expect to have some notable immediate sensations, new insights or some recognizable results from our efforts at relating with God, meditating on truths or otherwise exercising our spiritual faculties. If our early attempts seem to result in nothing immediately recognizable as valuable to us, we could easily become discouraged. Reflection is essential for finding what we seek through spiritual activity.

Our fast-paced culture of constant moving from one interest to another is not a helpful model for us when we want to become more aware of intangible realities that make life more fulfilling and purposeful in all our associations with others, including our relationship with God. Just as friendship does not consist in the meals we have together but in the sharing of stories that often take place at table, we know that many of our daily experiences have more to them than we would otherwise have from a mere listing of a sequence of events.

When we take just a moment to look within at least those experiences which spontaneously come to mind when we pause, we will be able to recognize some of the particular thoughts, words and actions that elicit gratitude. Something has indeed happened, which we might appreciate as being inspired and very likely spiritual. Ordinary reflection often reveals to us some of the extraordinary gifts that we have received and in which we have freely participated.

“Nothing,” once we become aware of the opportunities awaiting us, becomes a positive reminder to engage in reflection. It does not take much time, only our attention to what takes place within us.

Randy