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Pepper

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Pepper

Perhaps the word, "pepper" brings to mind the finely ground variety found on many tables where food is provided. Some people might think of freshly ground pepper, or chili peppers, or the taste or scent of pepper. One word can evoke a variety of memories, some that are unique to us as individuals, others that we probably share in common. Many of us have had the experience of sneezing if we were too close to pepper when it was being chopped, ground, or poured out.

Memory is a wonderful gift in itself, as is food, but when we link imagination with memory we do far more for our spirituality than pepper can bring about for even the tastiest of dishes. Many of us have had the experience of recalling some incident from our past and also imagined the possible motives, feelings and concerns of those who were involved. In so doing, we gained a truly satisfying understanding of what had transpired. Imagination served as the spice that changed the commonplace memory into an experience that we suddenly found "tasty" and worth remembering.

Because we can imagine connections that transcend linear logic, we are not only able to recall the mere historical facts from our past, but also their meaning for us, both then and now. For example, we all suffered some real or imagined shortchanges to the love we desired as children, for we had at the time no perspectives as to the needs or capabilities of those who raised us. With the proper amount of "pepper" provided by imagination, we might now taste the more appetizing illumination that we were loved in realistic human ways that we could not understand at the time. We might even be moved to tears with a sudden recognition in the present of something that we were unable to comprehend in the past. Having learned that we show love more in deeds than in words, and that much of what we do for others is composed of unseen sacrifices of time and energy, we now can remember with an appropriate amount of imagination that those who raised us loved us more than we knew or appreciated: a cause for gratitude rather than regret.

While memory is attached to events of the past, imagination can move in any direction, even to life after death, and still keep us in touch with present reality. We cannot apologize to those who have gone before us if we were to come to the conclusion that we had not been grateful enough, but we can properly imagine that they, in their present timelessness and fullness of love need no apologies. Rather, we can acknowledge our present thankfulness as an aspect of our love, and thereby connect with them in a manner that is appropriate and real. We make use of what we know about love, that it does not come to an end, and imagine that those who have died, and who loved,

are present with God who is Love, and are wholly taken up with the one activity that unites us all, both in time and beyond time.

The variety of recipes for combining imagination and memory is endless. We can employ this "pepper" in our personal reminiscences or in prayer, as a normal, healthy process of applying all that we have learned in life to incidents in our past when we did not have such learning. Imagination can be rightly used as a seasoning for memory, but never in a fruitless attempt to control either our past or our present.

"Pepper" is but one graced aspect of our relationship with God and with all of creation.