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2012

## Alone?

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Roche, Fr. Randy, "Alone?" (2012). *Spiritual Essays*. 273.

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Alone?

Loneliness in any form is an uncomfortable occurrence for most of us, intensely painful for some persons. The degree of pain is often inversely proportional to the level of self-confidence each one possesses, and is absolutely related to experiences of being loved. When we are alone at times, we might or might not be lonely, depending upon our perspective.

Self-confidence is not something that we can buy or quickly acquire at a time of loneliness, though the more deeply we feel that we are alone, in a negative sense of the word, the more we might be motivated to seek the means to developing inner strength. Some persons choose to be always in the presence of others as a means for warding off feelings of loneliness, but they remain dependent on their physical presence which can never be assured. Those who are willing to make the efforts to develop an appreciation for who they are, even when they are alone, discover a deeper truth: they are never really alone.

Some writers recommend "making friends with oneself," thereby suggesting that reflection on our positive qualities is of more value than thinking about how we are bereft of companionship. At a deeper level, when any of us chooses to face our aloneness in the presence of God, the benefits are at least two-fold: a growing sense that we are not alone, ever, and that the One who is always with us, loves us. In a paradoxical manner, the means to healing the pain of loneliness is often achieved by taking some time to reflect on our gifts rather than on what we do not have, and to deliberately seek to encounter God in the midst of our feelings of loneliness.

We do not automatically have an appropriate love for ourselves, and can easily take the negative side of thinking that we know ourselves, especially our shortcomings, much better than others could know us. One of the saving mysteries of human life is revealed in the times when we rightly interpret the actions or attitudes of others as love for us. Based on some graced inspirations or intuitions, we make an act of faith that we are loved, even though we might be aware of some of our limitations or failings. No particular words or deeds of others and no careful screening of data on our part necessarily lead us to the conclusion that someone cares about us as we are. When the graced experience takes place inside us, one of the positive consequences is increased self-confidence. Loneliness does not thrive in the hearts of those who have been led to believe that they are loved.

Whenever we might be alone, and begin to have feelings of loneliness, we can recall some of the clear signs we have previously noticed indicating that

we are loved. We can also turn inward to the God of all love, and experience anew that we are not alone. In prayerful reflection we will be able to recognize and acknowledge the great variety of ways that we are loved in this life: not only in those few very special relationships, but in every little nod of respect, each moment that someone listens to us, and all occasions when we are accepted as we are.

Alone? Not really.