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Peace

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Peace

War is not the only word for expressing the opposite of peace. We can think not only about the absence of extreme violence following the "cessation of hostilities," but also the interior quiet that arises within us when we put an end to thoughts that do violence to our spirits. Who has not welcomed the calm that follows the dispersal of anxiety or anger? We greatly appreciate peace of heart as radically different from experiences of conflicted thoughts and their accompanying feelings.

Some might say that peace only follows victory after physical or spiritual conflict, or that peace is merely the absence of struggle. But peace of heart is more than a surcease from disturbances of any kind. Peace in one's heart is also an inner conviction that "all is well" and is also a sign of God's presence in the midst of this moment's realities, whether pleasant or painful.

Just as we cannot enforce peace between two persons who both insist "my way or no way," we cannot come to peace in our own hearts while insisting that we must have a particular thing, a certain personal quality, or a sure understanding of all reality, in order to be fulfilled. The main prerequisite for peace is a willingness to recognize and accept the gifts that are present in any and all circumstances. If there is any "price" to our receiving the gift of peace it would be in the necessity of letting go of our supposed ability to determine the sources of our happiness and acknowledging that spirituality is based as much on interior feelings as on thinking.

While experiences of peace often arise as a consequence of conquering some inappropriate movement within us, peace is more often appreciated as an abiding manifestation of an undivided heart that is oriented towards something greater than self. We can look to our past, and perhaps recall a time when we were confused and in turmoil over two alternatives, and could not arrive at a satisfactory conclusion. And we might recall another situation, somewhat similar, but one in which our commitment to a value or to a person enabled us to make a decision that was followed by a sense of peace that remained with us.

If we reflect on our experiences, we will recognize that we have never been able to create for ourselves peace of soul, and there is also no possibility of contenting ourselves with a faked sense of peace. More importantly, we have found that we have known peace within us during times even of physical, emotional, or spiritual suffering. Neither external nor interior pain can diminish the integrity of our values or beliefs. The only real obstacles to peace are either an unremitting attention to surface attractions and

repulsions or a commitment to reasoning as the sole means for negotiating life's challenges.

Thoughts and feelings may come and go on the surface of our consciousness, while peace abides as the familiar sense of being at home with ourselves, and at home also with God.