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## Counting

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## Counting

Children learn early in life how to count numbers. We learn, sometimes very early, but also at other significant moments in our lives how much “we count,” as persons. We have the capability of counting to ten before saying something that we might later regret. But the realization that “we count” is something that we usually learn from others, as they reflect to us our value as persons.

Our worth, however and to whatever degree we accept it, is not diminished if some people treat us as though we count for nothing. Just as we do not create our dignity as humans, neither can people give us our significance in the world nor can they take it away. But our experiences of interactions with others, both positive and negative, often affect how we feel about ourselves, so that, on some days more than on others, we are willing to acknowledge that “we count.”

Self-confidence is founded not so much on our accomplishments but rather on our God-given existence and concomitant purpose. And accepting ourselves as we are is of much more benefit to others than to us. Without wearing a sign on our foreheads, people know that they can count on us for assistance because they recognize intuitively that we ourselves “count.” No one can give what they do not have. We can make a positive difference in the lives of others not only by what we say and do, but by who we are, when we have learned to trust both our capabilities and our good intentions. Acknowledging our unique place in the world need not be a matter of self-centered pride, but a reflection of the “no-fault” insurance policy by which God chooses us and we accept our particular gifts and limitations.

Though even the youngest children “count” in our estimation of their worth, they have to be taught how to count from one to ten, and in so doing, begin to appreciate themselves as capable of acting on their own, as “counting.” We too can reflect on the skills we develop as being valuable, and recognizing that we find more fulfillment in applying ourselves to making life better for others than when we focus our energies entirely on ourselves. Much as we might take pleasure in finally taking time to clean and organize our personal space, we are likely to be more pleased with ourselves after we have helped someone else to overcome an obstacle.

All of us continue to learn about ourselves and our place in the world from our direct encounters with God, with others, through media, and by observation. We also have experiences of teaching, guiding, and leading others in ways that are often informal and not identified as such because we act more from who we are than according to specific categories and titles.

If we take some time for a brief spiritual exercise of “counting our blessings,” of reviewing at least some of the contributions we intend, desire, and make on behalf of others, we will be able to smile a bit and to recognize with simple honesty, “I count.”