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## "Why?"

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“Why?”

Children ask questions because they are curious, and want to learn. They also discover that they can ask questions more for the reactions they receive than for information. We too seek reasons, sometimes from curiosity, and sometimes to obtain helpful information, but also, at times, to express our feelings or even to provoke a response.

If we ask of a person who has disappointed us, “Why did you do that?” we are not nearly as interested in reasons as we are in reconciliation. We want more than mere intellectual understanding; we seek healing for our hurt or anger. Excuses will not do. Expressions of sincere concern are quite acceptable.

Sometimes “why” is not a helpful question, especially if we mistakenly imagine that information will satisfy both mind and heart. For example, we might ask, “Why did my friend or family member die?” Even if someone would answer with a medical cause of death we would only be partially satisfied with the answer. Mostly, in such a situation, we need help to come to terms with loss. To keep asking “why” can interfere with resolving the pain that we would experience.

When asking the question “why” does not bring us satisfying answers, we do well to stop asking it. The question that will open us to inspirations is: “What am I to do?” In response to a hurt, we need to seek healing, or reconciliation, or we might determine that it is time to make a statement, or change a job or a relationship. Asking “why” often goes nowhere. Asking “what” engages us in determining our next step.

When a child asks “why” in order to understand, we give the best answer we can. When the question is asked as an expression of anger or hurt, we do not give reasons, but show our compassion for them, and instinctively try to help them deal with their underlying concerns. God, too, does not answer the question “why” when it is not really helpful to us. “If only I could understand” is commonly thought of as a resolution to a painful situation, but very often we need love much more than knowledge. God always loves us, but does not always respond to our insistence on either explanations or reasons for whatever troubles us.

We do not live on knowledge alone, and we do not have reasons for all that we do – at least not reasons that we consciously apply to every thought, word, or act. Some of our behavior comes directly from the

heart, from habits, or from spontaneous responses or reactions. We can make up reasons after the fact to try to please someone else, and we can rationalize particular choices even to ourselves. But honesty and integrity require that we accept and live with the consequences of both our thoughtful and thoughtless decisions. Likewise, whether or not we understand why things happen, what we do about them constitutes who we are as persons.

God must receive many "why" questions that are really accusations, though not consciously intended as such. When any of us experiences suffering personally, or is concerned about that of others, we might ask, "Why did this happen?" and implicitly or explicitly blame God for whatever we or others experience. Rarely do we receive, in such circumstances, a set of explanations from God. What reasons can any of us give, if someone asks "Why did you not love me the way I wanted you to love me?" We love people the way we love them, and they can accept and believe it or not. God loves us the way God loves us, and we can accept and believe it or not.

When our starting point is either trust or love, we will find the right questions to ask, and receive the answers that satisfy both mind and heart.