



Franciscan Living

God, Where Are You?

By Francine Gikow, SFO
Staff Editor

Inevitably, there comes a period in every Secular Franciscan's life, sometimes during certain occasions and sometimes for years, when God seems distant. It has been described as "darkness," "dryness," or a "desert." We plead with God to know the touch of His compassion, to experience His consolation again, but there is no answer. Our soul cries out as in the psalms: *"How long, Lord? Will you utterly forget me? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1-2)*

All of our usual methods of renewal don't seem to be working. We pray more, but the prayer is dry and, seemingly, without reward. We double our efforts in the apostolate, but we are not able to see the face of God in the people we meet. Everywhere we turn, life is difficult, unrewarding and bland. We yearn for God even more, but He is not there. We are deserted and it is devastating to us because, we have committed our lives to this very Way of Life.

This darkness is a mystery. We know not why or for what reason God, in his infinite wisdom, seemingly withdraws from us.

Is this darkness a way that God entices us to love him more? After all, isn't there a saying that "absence makes the heart grow fonder?" Does God remove himself from us so that we appreciate Him more...so that we yearn for Him more? Perhaps.

It may seem like a test: to see how strong we are in our faith. Like Job, can we still have that hope in Him? Can we holdfast to what we profess and promise? Are we

being purified like refined gold and silver or are we pliable like rubber, ready to bend every which way or even break like fragile glass?

Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta endured many years of darkness. Yet, few in her community were even aware of her spiritual dryness. They only saw the "fruits" of her relationship with God: the goodness of God evident in her life. Sometimes, it is only through these "fruits" that we know we are still in relationship with God. We may no longer have consolations but, instead, might see evidence of God's love for us through the goodness of His ways.

You might be able to discern His love for you when everyday responses are inspired by Him. (Remember how your heart sings when you recognize His action in your life?) You might even see Him working through you to care for others. It humbles you when you see it and strikes you with awe!

God in His infinite wisdom still speaks to us, perhaps not directly with personal consolations, but indirectly through our lives and through each other. His working in the world changes the way we think about Him, our relationship with Him and with His people.

"Stand and consider the wondrous works of God! Do you know how God lays his commands upon them, and makes the light shine forth from his clouds?" (Job 37:14-1)

No, we don't know how God makes the light shine forth from His clouds. We don't know the mind of God or how He works but we see the "fruits" of Him. It is still a mystery. It has to be a way of love, trust and hope.

Sometimes, I think the Secular Franciscan needs to be stubborn. Stubborn in the commitment to our Way of life, and to Christ. Stubborn in not giving up when God is silent, distant or seemingly absent. But stubbornness only goes so far. That's when our fraternity takes over. We grow in the love of God by the example of others enduring the same darkness and we find companionship in the journey. In short, misery likes company! But this is holy company designed to assist us in our commitment. Mother Teresa once said we are not called to be successful but to be faithful.

Job finally comes to the conclusion of his suffering and says:

*"I know that you can do all things,
And that no purpose of yours can be hindered.
I have dealt with great things that I do not understand;
things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know.
I have heard of you by word of mouth,
but now my eye has seen you." (Job 42:2-5)*