

## LENT SERMONS: "Practicing the Presence of God"

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### IV Lent, the Fourth Sunday in Lent

Joshua 5:9-12, Psalm 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

Depth Psychology Temperament preferences...Intuition, Sensation. Thinking, Feeling

What to do if you are a Sensation type in preference? After age 50, we should be integrating all of them, even if we want to ignore our least favorite. But for a personal spiritual Practice of the Presence of God, there is a method that each type will PREFER to use. Finally, we move on to the SENSATE Temperament Preference.

But first, let's take a closer look at our Prodigal Son. This parable in Luke is probably the most famous one of all, next to the Good Samaritan. When I was mentoring groups in the 4-year Education for Ministry Episcopal Program, we always had a reflection to do based on a Bible story, and the discussion on the Prodigal and his bitter older brother, the beneficent Father and the fatted calf, was always picked to talk about, I think, because we all can see so much of ourselves in it.

Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman in the House of Representatives and a presidential candidate in 1972, was known for her memorable sayings.

*"If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring in a folding chair."*

Well, the Prodigal had himself a folding chair when he returned to his right mind, straightened himself out and came back home. The folding chair in this case was the Jewish law that decreed that if a situation like this happened, where an impulse to leave home, live a wastrel life, and spend his family money, the bad boy should be allowed back to the family farm.

However, the Law said that for the rest of his life, he would be declared a slave to the place and NEVER resume his place at the table. Not much of a folding chair! The people listening to Jesus knew this law and Jesus knew they knew it, so imagine their surprise when the forgiving Father not only rejoiced to see him, but threw a fiesta for him in his honor never before seen!

Anyway, we all know that the real problem child here is the older brother, who was unable to rejoice in his sibling's restoration and status. His scurrilous behavior was on high display in the media coverage this week...nasty, mean-spirited, unforgiving and with totally selfish motivations all around. Now, we have in living memory what the opposite of compassion looks like, and as we examine ourselves in this God-given season of penitence, we all need to search our own hearts to see if that kind of unforgiveness has taken root in our souls.

What Paul is talking about in today's epistle is what can happen when we do that search and work to replace that self-serving greediness with Christ's compassion. The Franciscan Richard Rohr has explained it this way... *"Paul's transformation involved an "identity transplant"—his old identity was replaced by a new identity "in Christ." . . . We have in mind an analogy to modern medicine's heart transplant, in which an old heart is replaced by a new heart. In Paul's case, his spirit—the old Paul—had been replaced by the Spirit of Christ."*

It's the forgiveness of the Father in our story.

Rohr goes on to explain that his terms “In Christ” or “The Mind of Christ” are a way to describe the Spiritual Practice of CONTEMPLATION, which I think belongs to the Sensate Temperament Preference. It is simply to Think nothing [Lectio Divina], to Do nothing [The Jesus Prayer], to not seek to Feel anything [The Tharseo Rosary] but just to be absolutely quiet and exist in Jesus. What you may hear, see, smell, taste or feel in the environment in which you are sitting can all just exist by themselves, going on by. You don’t do anything about what your senses are sensing...you are just actively aware that they exist and you exist. Perhaps if you need help; just be aware of the feel of air on that little place under your nose as you breathe, and nothing else.

Before you start, find a simple word you say to yourself when your mind, your monkey mind and your lizard brain decide to barge in and wander off with you. (I just say to myself, “Lord”.)

This is not IF your mind wanders you off, it’s WHEN...because it will try! I had a youth group retreat in Los Angeles who were exploring this spiritual practice. And when I asked them for their choice of word of return, one of them said “Skateboard”! Whatever works!

And that’s another thing. This is really hard to do alone, because the world keeps on pressing with your own personal agenda written on it in 18-point type. We used to do it as part of our musical Taize services. You can tell when Contemplation is over when you hear a yawn, a cough, a rustle, a change of position. But that is okay. We had 15 minutes of Contemplation of the Love of Christ for us personally and corporately...way more than we would have with just our personal good intentions, which can so easily slide over into grief and guilt. Yuch!!

This is not meditation not self-hypnotism, not beginning of drowsiness, not introspection, not at all. A Sensate Temperamental preference can slide into a picture of not anything, a spectrum of color, a beautiful star-shine, a happy blank. It’s not for everyone. I’m talking about the opposite of a sensate who can’t find her car in a parking lot...and this one is the hardest for me. But like we’ve said before, after the age of 50, if you’d like the idea of being whole, go for it! The struggle counts, and this is Lent, after all.

One day, a weekday tourist to Northern New England was looking over to some of the white frame clapboard chapels in the area designated as “summer churches”. No heat, no plumbing, no insulation, just small buildings some long-ago righteous souls had put up for God. The visitor parked his car, came in quietly and noticed a solitary man sitting all by himself in the front pew.

“Oh, sorry to bother you”, the tourist said. “Oh, It’s no bother to me, welcome!,” was the reply.

“But do you do here? Are you okay?” “Oh yes, I come here all the time”, the native said.

“But why?”, asked the tourist. “Why? Oh, I just show up because I know the Lord loves me... and I just want him to be able to see my face.” Amen? Amen.