

A Mutually Loving Gaze

By Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM

I believe that we do not have real access to *who we fully are* except in God. Only when we rest in God can we find the safety, the spaciousness, and the scary freedom to be *who we are*, *all* that we are, and *much more* than we think we are, “warts and all.” (Make sure you need to be forgiven for something or you will never know this!) It’s only when we find ourselves in God, and live and see through God’s eyes that “everything belongs.” All other systems exclude, expel, punish, and protect to find identity for their members in some kind of ideological perfection or separate superiority. Most think “the contaminating element” must be searched out, isolated, and often punished. This wasted effort keeps us from the centrally important task of love and union.

To have naked interface with the Ultimate Other is to know one’s self in one’s truest and deepest being. When we allow ourselves to be perfectly received, totally gazed upon by the One who knows everything and receives everything, we are indestructible.

If we can learn how to receive the perfect gaze of the Other, and to be mirrored by the Other, then the voices of the human crowd, even negative ones, have little power to hurt us. Best of all, as Meister Eckhart (1260–1327) has been quoted, “The eye with which you will look back at God will be the same eye with which God first looked at you.” [1]

Standing humbly before God’s gaze not only unites the psyche but it does the very thing that I know when I teach contemplative prayer. It unifies desire. It frees us from what Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) called the “vertigo of the imagination.” [2] It’s the whirlpool of imagination, looking here, there, and everywhere. Standing before *one*, *accepting God* literally allows us to be composed and gathered in one place. We *can* be in one place; we *can* be here, now. We can stop always looking over there for tomorrow’s happiness. As the apostle Paul wrote, “now is the favorable time, today is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2).

We see that Paul understands this in a most beautiful paragraph from his Second Letter to the Corinthians. He says, “We with our unveiled faces will gradually reflect like mirrors the brightness of the Lord. All will grow brighter and brighter as we are gradually turned into the image that we reflect” (3:18). That’s it!

It doesn’t have to do with being perfect. It has to do with being in relationship, holding onto union as tightly as God holds onto us, staying in there. The one who knows all and

receives all, as a mirror does, has no trouble forgiving all. It's not a matter of being correct, but of being connected.

[1] Meister Eckhart, *Qui Audit Me Non Confundetur (Whoever Hears Me Is Not Ashamed)*, Sermon on Sirach 24:30. Eckhart used the Latin Vulgate Bible; this verse is Sirach 24:22 in later translations. This apocryphal text is in Catholic but not Protestant Bibles.

[2] Henri de Lubac, *The Discovery of God*, trans. Alexander Dru (New York: P. J. Kenedy and Sons, 1960), 45.