

Looking with a Loving Gaze

No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in a loving relationship when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One who loves us has a name in the Christian Tradition – contemplation. The English word is derived from the Latin, ‘contemplari’ meaning ‘to gaze at attentively.’ It is a prayer that is particularly appropriate before Jesus, present in the Blessed Sacrament. The Jesuit priest, Walter Burghardt described this form of prayer as, ‘A long, loving look at the real.’ Each word in Burghardt’s description is significant — real... look... long... loving.

The Real

To take a long, loving look at something — people, places, trees, lakes, a new born child, mountains, is a natural act of contemplation, of loving admiration.

The ‘real’ we are invited to contemplate now, to look on with loving admiration is what we call ‘The Real Presence’ — Jesus truly present in the Blessed Sacrament and waiting for us to call upon him.

The Look

It is looking at rather than thinking. I do not try to analyse, describe or define. I enter into communion. Burghardt gives the example, ‘As I sit by a river, I do not cry out, ‘Look, H²O.’ I simply let the water trickle through my fingers.’ To ‘look’ means to engage not only with my mind, but with the whole person, — the eyes, the ears, touch smell and taste. We are invited to rest in what we have come to know, in ‘what we have heard, what we have seen, with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands’, (1Jn1:1)

The Long Look

St Alphonsus Liguori speaking of his own experience of time before the Blessed Sacrament once remarked that sometimes a quarter of an hour before the Blessed Sacrament seemed like an age! The Lord is not a time-keeper. It is not time itself that is important but rather as measure of the quality of our commitment and love. ‘The long, loving look at the real’ is about resting rather than rushing, about allowing myself to be unhurried, to be happy simply to linger and wait — to patiently wait for Jesus to speak.

The Loving Look

‘A long, loving look at the real’ is a gaze rather than a fixed stare. It means allowing the ‘real’, in this case, Jesus, really and truly present in the Blessed Sacrament, to capture me, to delight me, to let myself be drawn into communion.

And, of course, all this we do within God’s ‘long, loving look’ at us which shines over every moment of every day.

Acknowledgements

Time before the Blessed Sacrament is a series of leaflets produced by the Spirituality Committee in preparation for *Adoremus*. It is intended for individual reflection as part of a time of prayer before the Blessed Sacrament or Exposition. It could also be used with small groups.

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Head of Christ Based on Leonardo da Vinci British Museum.

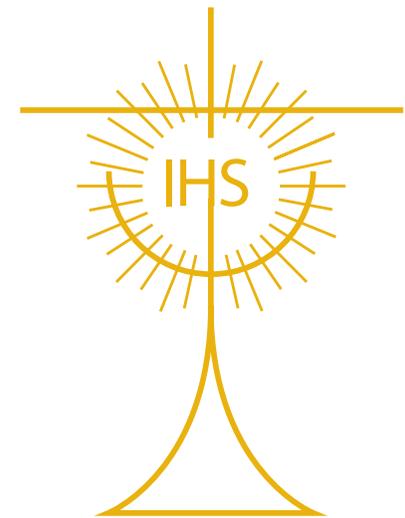
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Time before the Blessed Sacrament

Looking

○ If you my heart has spoken:
‘Seek his face.’

Psalm 26:8



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Looking at Scripture

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life — the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us — that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

1 John 1:1-4

Reflection

How good am I at looking, noticing things?

How good am I at being looked at?

What stops me from contemplating, from looking with love?

What helps me to see?

What can I see of God's presence now?



Prayer

Godhead here in hiding, whom I do adore,
masked by these bare shadows,
shape and nothing more,
see, Lord, at thy service low lies
here a heart
lost, all lost in wonder at the God thou art.

Jesu, whom I look at shrouded here below,
I beseech thee send me what I thirst for so,
some day to gaze on thee
face to face in light
and be blest for ever with thy glory's sight.

Adoro te devote by St Thomas Aquinas
tr. Gerard Manley Hopkins