

# In the Presence of God



## The Bishop Speaks



Sometimes we have moments that we might call ‘God moments’, when we feel God’s presence very keenly and when we feel very close to God. It can come when we are walking through a forest; holding a baby; or listening to music. Through an experience of our senses God somehow reaches through and touches our soul. These are special times that we wish could last for longer or perhaps never end.

Sometimes these “God moments” come to us more directly during our prayer. It’s when the Holy Spirit transports us beyond effort and formulas and we talk and listen to God in our soul without any words being exchanged. These are those rare moments of prayer when we just *feel* God. These too are moments that we delight in for as long as we can before getting back to life’s chores.

The Apostles Peter, James, and John experienced a “God moment” during the well-known event of Jesus’ transfiguration which we will hear at Mass in the early weeks of Lent which begins soon. These three Apostles were privileged to see Jesus transfigured in their presence: his face shining like the sun; his clothes becoming as white as the light;

they themselves being enveloped in a bright cloud; and hearing the voice of God the Father say, “This is my Son the beloved, he enjoys my favour, listen to him.”

Knowing that they are having a unique encounter with God they fell with their faces to the ground, they exclaim how wonderful it is to be there, and they want to build three tents there to prolong the moment. They wanted to linger on the mountain top with God for as long as possible before getting back to life’s chores.

How interesting it is that the Apostles who want to linger with God on the mountain top can’t wait to get away from him in the garden. When Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane all his Apostles except one flee in haste. Yet even at that moment of suffering and trial they were just as much in the presence of God, for it is the same Jesus on the mountain and in the garden, they just didn’t *feel* it.

A challenge for us is to be able to find and sense the presence of God just as much in the agony as in the ecstasy, in our trials and our victories, in moments of both sadness and joy. For didn’t Jesus say, “I

COVER PHOTO: Emily Smith, St Joseph’s Tenterfield and Jonathan McCallum, St Philomena’s Moree with local Panamanian Dancers who were performing at the Vocations Fair as part of World Youth Day.



am with you *always*”? When the family is fighting, when work is stressing, when a friend is dying, when I’m struggling to keep faith, when people are attacking me, God is with me and God is loving me. Certainly, in these moments we sense or feel His divine presence in a different way to our mountaintop experiences, but it is no less real. It can be even stronger.

Another challenge for us is to be able to find and sense the presence of God when we meet and encounter somebody else who is suffering: the person suffering. For didn’t Jesus say that whatever we do for the least of our brothers and sisters we do for him?

Knowing he was in the presence of God at the Transfiguration Peter said, “It is wonderful for us to be here”. Am I able to say these words not only when I’m having a beautiful “God moment” but also when somebody is asking me for help or when I’m having a particularly rough day? Or do I turn and run?

An often overlooked but important event on the mount of the Transfiguration that day was Jesus going up to Peter, James, and John as they lay

prostrate on the ground and simply touching them saying “stand up, do not be afraid”. This is my favourite part in the Transfiguration story because it’s the ‘Divine touch’ of God reminding us of his gentle and compassionate presence in our lives.

This gentle Divine Touch of God comes to us in a most particular way in the Eucharist at Mass. When we come to Mass to worship Him as the Apostles did on the mountain, when we truly participate in the Mass with our voice, our gestures, our minds and our souls, when we are properly prepared for Holy Communion, those quiet and still moments during Mass can be truly wonderful moments when we sense God’s presence and love. Such moments will not always come to us, but when they do, we should enjoy them as a gift from God and not be in a hurry for the moment to pass. At these and other ‘God moments’ we should linger awhile with God!

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