



HAIL

REFLECTIONS ON THE
MYSTERIES OF THE ROSARY

MARY

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THE GAZE OF THE DELIGHTED OTHER

THE TRUE GOD GIVES HIS FLESH AND BLOOD. —Les Murray

Sometimes it feels as if our Australian culture has lost its sense of the presence of the Spirit.

Perhaps an old Aboriginal man, quoted by W. E. H. Stanner, was partly right: 'White man got no dreaming, him go 'nother way. White man, him go different. Him got road belong himself.'

But we as Christians can never accept this as the total truth. For the Holy Spirit has 'descended' and is abundantly present among us, the Pentecostal, Spirit-filled People of God.

It is just that the Holy Spirit shows up in all sorts of ways and places in life that we do not expect! Somehow we are just not 'seeing' or 'dreaming' right!

The solution is not to try harder, or apply other versions of moralism. Rather it is accepting and yielding to the presence of the Spirit that is always pure, unearned gift.

In other words, the Spirit comes when we accept (usually after much resistance and struggle) that 'we cannot do it ourselves'.

As the 12-step programs know so well, the salvation that comes from the Spirit happens by grace. There is a story of a little village in Bosnia that refused to join the fighting during the 1990s conflict. When militias recruited young men for battle, they said no. When the militias then burned their houses, other families took them in. Other towns had tried everything to keep from joining the war, but they failed. But in some way, the neighbours in this village remained at peace while fighting raged all around them. No one knows how it happened, but nearly everyone in the country knows the story. They slowly shake their heads. 'God,' they say. 'It can only have been God.'

When we do surrender to our God then we come to see the signs of the Holy Spirit in persons, events and things everywhere around us.

We notice that authentic experiences of the Spirit lead people to feel more identified with and open to the rest of humanity and the world. Experiences that lead to feelings of being more special or better than other people or to self-absorption are probably not authentic.

The Spirit also generates a particular kind of humility, one that painfully recognises more of one's human inadequacy, yet at the same time increasingly realises one's own preciousness and worth as a child of God. It is a humility that is combined with dignity. The Spirit never leads to arrogance or devaluing of oneself. It is never sectarian or cult-like.

While it is true that the Spirit can bring about spectacular 'fireworks', as at the first Pentecost—with celebration and enthusiasm or with fear and trepidation—our usual experience is more ordinary. Often we simply (re)discover that all life is holy, and the miraculous presence of God's grace flows through all of it.

Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson once said that a foundational element of infant development was experiencing 'the gaze of a delighted other'. The deepest act of love is not help or service; but this immediate, attentive, gazing presence.

Some mystics remind us that this is precisely how the Spirit 'descends' upon each of us. They call us to respond with 'the practice of the presence of God'. One of Denise Levertov's last poems, "The Conversion of Brother Lawrence", tells the beautiful story of a 17th-century monk and of this openness to the Spirit's descent:

*... everything faded, thinned to nothing, beside
the light which bathed and warmed,
the Presence*

*your being had opened to. Where it shone,
there life was, and abundantly; it touched your
dullest task, and the task was easy.*

*Joyful, absorbed,
you 'practiced the presence of God' as a
musician practices hour after hour his art:
'A stone before the carver',
you 'entered into yourself.'*

Resting in the presence of the Holy Spirit—as it descends upon us in our mundane lives—is 'bathing' in this realisation. We are indeed each seen through the gaze of the ultimate delighted Other—the Holy Spirit.



Ponder...

The fruits (evidence) of the Holy Spirit's presence are love, gentleness, kindness, joy, peace, self-control, patience, faithfulness and goodness. Reflect on the 'signs of the Holy Spirit in persons, events and things everywhere around'. Name the 'evidence' you find.

We notice 'Spirit-filled' people as those who authentically 'walk the walk' and 'talk the talk' for the common good. Identify someone who has personally inspired you in this way. Share their story with family or friends today.

Our Christian faith calls each of us to respond to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon us, with the 'practice of the presence of God'. Name some of the practical and emotional challenges of being this presence for others.

Make a time today to rest in the presence of the Holy Spirit and intentionally allow 'the gaze of the ultimate delighted Other' bathe you in love.



IF YOU WANT

If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the road
pregnant with the holy, and say,
"I need shelter for the night,
please take me inside your heart, my time is so close."
Then, under the roof of your soul,
you will witness the sublime intimacy,
the divine, the Christ, taking birth forever,
as she grasps your hand for help,
for each of us is the midwife of God, each of us.
Yes there, under the dome of your being
does creation come into existence eternally,
through your womb, dear pilgrim – the sacred womb of your soul,
as God grasps our arms for help:
for each of us is his beloved servant, never far.
If you want, the Virgin will come walking down the street
pregnant with Light and sing.

—St John of the Cross