



The Cursillo® Movement

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BEING PRESENT WITH THOSE WE LOVE: The Joy and the Challenge

Source: These are Dr. John Cuddeback's notes for the lecture he gave during the National Cursillo Encounter at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio - July 19, 2012.

Open with story of my son, who said, upon hearing about heaven:
“All I know is, if you and Mama are there, I’ll be happy.”

Principle: The notion of presence is at the heart of friendship, and of encounter. In order truly to encounter self, others, and God, we need to think in terms of Presence of Persons.

Aristotle’s treatment of friendship can be of assistance to us here.
We begin with presence.

My basic example of Presence for the sake of illustration:

A father is present in his home. He is present by his vision, and by his love. He knows the persons, and what they do. He is concerned about their every move. He puts order into the home: arranges the rooms, the furniture, the schedule. Anywhere in the house you can feel his presence: watching, checking, concerned, hopeful, forgiving. Even when he is not there, he is there.

Sum on presence.

Bottom line: I am present where my vision and heart are. Those things are present to me that I see and love. I am especially present when and where I am performing actions for the good of others.

My Plan: Consider the meaning and role of Presence, first as regards being ‘present’ to self, then as regards being present to others, especially our friends.

I. Issue One: Presence of self.

A. What is Presence of Self; Encounter with Self

A person needs to be present in himself (or his self be present to him). This means that he must see and love himself.

Now everyone does this to a certain extent: we all see, and love, ourselves in some way. But I want especially to focus on the issue of how we see ourselves. Who do we understand ourselves to be?

At one point St. Thomas Aquinas makes a great point: some men see and love themselves TRULY; in other words they see themselves as they should: as persons created in love to live according to God’s Holy Law.

THIS is essential to what I will call having a true presence of self. It seems to me that this fits well with the notion of an encounter with self. Have we truly seen ourselves? Now there is more than one meaning to this; or, there is more than one way that we need to see ourselves. The *first*

thing we need to see about ourselves is something that we all have in common; thus it is something that we all need to see and something that we can all help one another in seeing. We need to see that we are PERSONS who are LOVED into existence, and called to happiness in a relationship with our Creator. Ladies and Gentlemen, if we do not see this about ourselves, then in the most fundamental way, we do not know WHO we are.

[Comment: Consider the drama: do many of us do not realize who we are, and indeed, often we do not even realize that we do not realize.]

Again, if we do not see ourselves as lovable and loved, and made for love and happiness, then we do not know who we are; we have not yet fully encountered our own selves. The fundamental encounter with self is this joyful encounter; for it is to see (or to begin to see) how we are made for love, and out of love.

[Just think what a joy it is that often we can help others that we love, first of all encounter themselves...]

The second aspect of the encounter with self is to see one's particular characteristics (as opposed to what we share with all other human persons). We see many good things; these include our natural gifts and strengths, as well as, the ways that we have freely acted out our human and Christian vocation. But here we also see the ways in which we have fallen short of what we could and should be. This can be very painful, as we realize how we have failed ourselves, and God and others.

This encounter with self is a necessary complement to the first. I need to see where I as an individual stand, in light of the wonderful vocation to relationship with God and others. This enables me to see in what ways I must grow and improve in order to be more fully my true self.

Again, this can be very painful, BUT at root this encounter with self should always be one of *HOPE*. Wherever we discover ourselves to be in our particular journey, the fundamental reality remains this: love creates us, redeems us, and is ever ready to forgive and sanctify us.

These two encounters with self, or discoveries of self, are what enable us to have a TRUE presence of (or to) self; we see and love ourselves for we are, and what we are called to be.

B. How to enhance the encounter with self?

How can we try to enhance this encounter with self? There are of course many ways.

I want to focus on what I have called Self-Presence. Again, my main theme this evening is PRESENCE OF PERSONS. [We need to put presence of persons first.]

This is our first issue: How to be more present in my very self. The principles that we see here will also apply to our presence with other persons. As Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas saw, how we see and love ourselves is a fundamental determinant of how we see and love others.

Our Goal: to see and love ourselves truly (or well).

Let us consider: what goes into our being able to see ourselves for who we are?

Means: I will mention Three things (ISL: interior life, silence, listening)

--we need to put the interior life first

--this is the life of the soul, of the mind, the will, the heart

Our interior life most of all constitutes who we are. We must cultivate it.
--we need Silence: the space within which to hear and see, calmly and clearly
--absence of exterior noise
--absence of disordered passions
Note: the unchaste person can never clearly see himself or others.

--we need to listen

Many voices are speaking to us, telling us what to think about ourselves, and who we are (You're too fat, you don't belong—you're too old fashioned, you should have a nicer car, you should have a better career or you can't be happy; you should look younger; you're wasting your time with your children; you're a failure; or maybe: you're so wonderfully rich, you're a success; you're the envy of the neighborhood; you're so beautiful.)

Where are the voices that speak to us the truth, the truth about ourselves, about who we are and where we stand? We need to find these voices, and give them a place, lend them our ears.

To begin: Spiritual reading and meditation are a way of listening to others. Reading and meditation grow in silence. In them we feed our mind and soul with words of truth.

The most foundational is reading and meditating upon Sacred Scripture, the Word of God.

Most of all we need to lend our ear to Christ. He is speaking to us: through Scripture, through the Church, and in our hearts in prayer: both liturgical and private. He is telling us who we are; and He knows.

Now through each of the above means we grow in the ability to see and love ourselves for who we truly are, and are called to be.

[Let us note how there is an important distinction here: true knowledge and love concerns both the person as he is now, and as he can and should become. As we grow in self-knowledge, and in this encounter with self in being present to self, we know (and love) ourselves, both for we are now, and for who we are called to be.

Both are necessary. Indeed we cannot fully understand (and love) who we are now, unless we simultaneously have our eyes on that of which we are capable—that perfected image of Christ.]

[This is one reason that Vatican II says, and Bl. John Paul II loved to quote it:

“Christ, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling.”

In other words, when we see Christ, we see that which we can and should be.]

In a special way, we need to have true friends to whom we listen. Thus we now turn our attention to the topic of...

II. Friends and Presence

A. Basic Points on Friendship

1. Let's begin with the three acts of friendship.

According to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas there are three ways of acting that belong especially to true friendship:

--benevolence; beneficence; concord,

Or: good willing, good deeds, living with one heart.

Let us begin with a couple of notes about the first two (good willing and good deeds) and then we will focus on the third (concord).

Benevolence literally means good will. The notion of good will here is rich. Friends have a deep-seeded desire or wish that the other person flourish or do well. What they want most of all for each other is that each becomes the person he or she is called to be: truly to fulfill the Christian vocation. And this good will is fruitful; it leads to action. It leads to benefaction, which literally means doing-well for the other. This can take many forms. Examples include offering material support and giving moral counsel. In whatever form it takes, these actions spring from good will, and thus are done out of love for the friend.

We turn to concord. Oneness of heart, in acting together.

Here we are truly at the beating heart of friendship.

Consider the following words from St. Thomas Aquinas (explaining the position of Aristotle):

“Friendship consists in some kind of sharing together. But people share themselves with one another especially by living together. Hence living together seems to be most proper and pleasing to friendship.” (St. Thomas Aquinas’s commentary, 1946)

I love this point. What do we want more than anything else? –to be-with those we love.

[again, think of our children]

But we must be more specific: there are different ways of ‘being together.’ People can simply ‘be together’ in the same room, without really being together in mind, heart, or action. This is why Aristotle and St. Thomas speak of ‘living together’—which is richer than simply being together in the same place. But people can also ‘live together’ wrongly. They can share together in inappropriate or evil actions. *True human living together must consist in doing truly good actions together.* And here it is: this is happiness lived-out: living a good, holy human life *together.*

Now there are different kinds of good actions that friends share together. Aristotle puts a kind of primacy on one kind (though not to the exclusion others), and that is: conversation.

Aristotle explains that in the desire of friends to live-together, they especially seek to be profoundly conscious of, or we can say present to, each other.

St. Thomas Aquinas explains: “This takes place through constant association and the exchange of thoughts and reflection. In this way men are said to dwell with one another in an appropriate manner, not as cattle feeding together, but as human beings living a life that is proper to them.” (1910)

How then do persons most of all live together?: in the communion of rational presence.

Good conversation allows the exchange of thoughts that leads to a profound, mutual knowledge. This is not just a knowing of the other himself (or herself), but then even further and more significantly, it is a sharing in a common vision of higher things. Friends look at each other; AND they look outward and upward together.

True friends are thereby *together* in the most profoundly human of ways: they are with-one-another in *rational presence*. In sounds so simple, so obvious, but we must cultivate our ability to be rationally present with our friends.

Picture the conversation of true friends: no fear, complete peace; no worry whether I will say the wrong thing; total trust

Conversation of friends normally is about one of the following:

Communication of what is going on in our lives

Counsel about what is going on in our lives

Shared insights into the highest of realities.

SUM: We have now considered the fundamental acts of friendship, with an emphasis on Concord, or living together in one heart. And this last is most of all lived in the conversations of friends.

2. Let us NOW ASK: How do our Friends change our lives:

a. They show us ourselves

b. They make us better

a. It is in true friendship that we most of all learn to see ourselves, and to love ourselves.

It is perhaps obvious that we need others in order to see ourselves.

But more specifically, we need friends. Friends, more than anyone else can see us for who we are.

St. Thomas says: *Ubi amor, Ibi oculus*; Where there is love, there is vision.

We must always remember: only the lover truly sees. If we are failing to love, then we are also failing to see.

The true lover, the true friend, most of all sees us for who we are, and who we can be.

He would never be overly critical or harsh; but at the same time, he will always have his eye on how we can be better.

The loving eye of our friend gives us the confidence to see our own goodness, and to be more and more aware of how we fall short in our lives.

b. It is in true friendship that we most of all can grow into the persons we should be.

Why?

BECAUSE true friends help one another grow in virtue.

Truly loving and knowing us, present to us in a unique way, friends are **THERE** to support us in our journey.

Friends are present: acting with us, counseling us, inspiring us.

We should be convinced: without the sustained help of true friends, we will not become the persons we can and should become.

It is no surprise that St. Thomas Aquinas wrote: "Friends become better by working together and loving each other." 1951

[Sidepoint: these points apply also to marriage, a special instance of friendship, as well as to other friendships. Married people need both kinds.]

In view of these truths, let us turn to our FINAL consideration, a very practical one:

B. →How do we cultivate presence with other persons, especially friends.

1. the Challenge

Presence.

May I open with a rather chilling assertion?

We are losing the ability to BE TOGETHER; to be-with people; even those that we love most: family and friends. We are handicapped.

One main reason is because we do not know how to be present to ourselves.

Allow me to paint a picture:

We live almost constantly in the exterior forum.

Perhaps the bulk of our day is taken up with WORK, work of various kinds that, in any case given how we perform it, practically precludes our being present either to ourselves or others.

Then outside this work we turn to a host of pressing practical concerns that are not addressed while we are ‘working;’ but this too is work.

Outside of all this work we seek rest and distraction by entertainment: often it is mindless; sometimes it is morally inappropriate. Our entertainment is usually computerized or motorized, and usually tends to be private and isolating, even if done ‘together’ with others (such as looking at the same movie screen).

Less and less do we have natural contexts for significant contact with other human persons. Even the dinner table—that bastion of personal contact and of civilization itself—is more and more abandoned. How often are we reduced simply to ‘grabbing lunch’ together. We are connected via the internet to many people. Many of them we call ‘friends,’ though we have very little in common with them, and do not really share a life with them.

“Communication” is common; but sustained, quality conversations are rare. We are seldom truly present to people—self or others.

I think we need to recognize that here we are speaking of dominant and pervasive trends in our society. Given these trends, and these habits of interaction (and non-interaction), IF we are to have true presence of self and with friends then we must make an intentional and concerted effort – to put true, personal, rational, presence first.

ACTION STEPS:

How to think:

We are designed for presence, for presence to and with other persons.

We have a face to engage, arms to embrace, fingers to point.

Let us make it thematic in our minds and hearts.

Put persons, and presence with them, first.

We can remind ourselves: in a sense, what else matters?

I should have an explicit plan to cultivate my ability to be present with those I love.

How to act:

Negative:

Remove noise, distraction.

Technology. In this age of ours we must tackle this issue directly. I begin by noting two things that I take as given:

1) many recent technologies (such as internet and cell phones) can be truly useful. And further, given the current state of things, using them is functionally necessary.

But at the same time:

2) these same technologies present real challenges to the practice of presence of persons.

Consider: these technologies take my attention away from those I am bodily with.

E.g.: in our homes (how often are parents not present to their children, or vice versa; or in the café, bus... how many lost encounters, possibilities for evangelization?)

Here is my main assertion:

We **MUST** be intentionally, consciously restrict/limit our use of these technologies; otherwise our *presence* with those we love will be compromised.

For example: consider something like: I will only check my email twice a day.

Note: I am not saying that we cannot use technology for evangelization. We can. But evangelization will always be primarily with bodily presence. And real friendships are made in bodily presence.

Story of friend in France on the train, praying. The person said: I want to be able to do whatever it was that you were doing.

De-clutter our lives; do fewer and more meaningful things.

We are too busy. It is our responsibility to do something about it, and not just remark on it.

In de-cluttering we can use as a principle: which of the things I do are more conducive to being *present* to persons.

Positive:

1. Cultivate presence of self, as discussed above [note how this includes a real aspect of an interior conversation with self]

2. Provide the opportunities for real presence with friends.

Because the most natural opportunities for presence between persons arise in the home. I want to make something of a digression to consider briefly presence in the home...

We must begin in our homes: real time together should be a top priority.

It sounds simple. But doing it is another story.

Cooking together, eating together, reading together, singing together; and of course, praying together. These are all ways that we live a commitment to presence, to being together with those we love.

Let us consider the following words of Pope Benedict XVI, given in response to a little girl who said to him, I would really like to know something about your family and when you were little like me...:

Holy Father responds: Thank you, dear, and your parents. I thank you from my heart. Well, you asked about what my memories of my family are like: there would be a lot! I wanted to say only a few things. Sunday was always the important time for our family, but Sunday already began Saturday evening. Father read the readings to us from a book that was very popular in Germany at that time. The book also included an explanation of the readings. That is how Sunday began: we were already entering into the liturgy, in a joyful atmosphere. The next day we went to Mass. My home is very close to Salzburg, so we had a lot of music – Mozart, Schubert, Haydn – and when the Kyrie began it was as if heaven had opened up. And at home the big lunch together was

naturally important. And we also sang a lot: my brother is a great musician, he composed music for all of us already as a young man, and the whole family sang. Dad played the zither and sang; they are unforgettable moments. Then, of course, we took trips together, walking; we were near a forest and so walking in the forests was very nice: adventures, games, etc. In a word, we were one heart and one soul, with many shared experiences, even in very hard times, because it was wartime – first there was the dictatorship, then poverty. But this love that we had for each other, this joy even in simple things was strong and so we were able to overcome and endure even these things. I think that it was very important that even little things gave us joy because the other person's heart expressed itself in this way. And in this way we grew up in the certainty that it was good to be a human being, because we saw that God's goodness was reflected in our parents and in us children. And, to tell the truth, if I try to imagine a little how paradise will be, I think always of the time of my youth, of my childhood. In this context of confidence, of joy and love we were happy and I think that paradise must be something like how it was in my youth. In this sense I hope to go "home," going to the "other side of the world."

What a beautiful example of what loving presence in a family can do.

Consider the examples here of actions that encourage mutual presence: reading out loud, games, singing, adventures, hikes, and work.

In a sense it sounds so simple. But today we find this very difficult. Due to various factors in our times we must now make an explicit effort to have these kinds of activities, these times that are naturally conducive to presence of persons. This is the flipside of the 'negative element' we spoke of moments ago. At the same time that we are trimming distractions and activities that are not conducive to presence, we look especially to engage regularly in activities like those mentioned by the Pope.

We should begin in the home; but it must not end there. Regular quality time with a few good friends is essential.

3. Explicitly cultivate conversation about more serious matters.

Where our hearts are, there our conversations will be; and where our conversations are, there our hearts will be.

We can simultaneously work on 'reforming' our hearts and conversations at the same time.

The conversations of friends naturally range over the entire spectrum of life. And they should.

But we need to develop a habit of deeper, richer conversations. This, it seems to me, is to be counter-cultural. It is a bold step.

There are two kinds of more serious conversations: those where we discuss important practical issues (such as how to grow in virtue, how to educate our children, how to renew the social order), and those more fundamentally about sharing insights into beautiful things, things we simply gaze upon together.

E.g. of each:

- 1) conversation about how to deepen our prayer life, or to grow in chastity
- 2) conversation sharing what we've seen in meditation or prayer

My main purpose here is to encourage our putting a premium on such conversations.

As regards the first kind: let us think especially in terms of seeking counsel with our friends. Friends are in a unique position both to hold one another accountable, and to thus provide counsel/advice as regards the most pressing of issues.

As regards the second, let us think especially in terms of sharing what we have discovered (about the wonders of creation, of God...)—whether through experience, reading, meditation, or prayer. What a foretaste this is of heaven, where we enjoy the vision of God together.

Consider this as an instance of real presence...

I would like to conclude with a brief meditation on the Real Presence...

Our Lord told the apostles: it is good for you that I go.

But how can this be?

Fathers of the Church say: it was good for Him to go because we need to develop faith; and faith requires a kind of absence—a kind of lack of vision.

So He considered, how can I, while being absent in such a way as to enable and cultivate their faith, also be profoundly present with those I love.

Our Lord had a dilemma: His joy was to dwell among men. But how can He both dwell with us, AND elicit our faith.

Solution: To dwell with us under the appearance of bread. At once and the same time, this calls forth our faith (for all we see is bread), but He is also fully present.

The Eucharist is the Real Presence of a Friend.

Let us bring that Presence to others.