

# Sacrament of the Present Moment

Deuteronomy 30:10-14

Psalm 69

Colossians 1:15-20

Luke 10:25-37

Remember merry-go-rounds? I don't know if children play on merry-go-rounds anymore, but we had one on the playground of our elementary school when I was little. The goal of playing on the merry-go-round was to get it spinning as fast as possible and then try to avoid getting thrown off by centrifugal force (maybe this is why we don't see many merry-go-rounds anymore...). The key, of course, to staying on the rapidly spinning merry-go-round was to get as close to the center as possible. The center of the spinning merry-go-round is the calmest and most peaceful place on it; it's a place where one doesn't even have to hold on!

Many of you might remember Mark Mallett. He is a singer from Canada who has done a couple of concerts at our parish. Back in 2007, Mark blogged about how merry-go-rounds are wonderful images for the sacrament of the present moment. Mark writes—

The present moment is like the center of the merry-go-round; it is the place of *stillness* where one can rest, even though life is raging all around. The moment we begin to live in the past or the future, we leave the center and are *pulled* to the outside where suddenly great energy is demanded of us [in order] to “hang on.”<sup>1</sup>

It is very difficult for us to simply live in the present moment. Our regrets pull us into the past and our dissatisfaction pushes us to the future. Even in those rare times when we are able to be in the present, we clutter it with multiple tasks and fracture ourselves to try to get more and more accomplished. Because it is so hard for us to simply live in the present moment, some spiritual writers have called the present moment a “sacrament.”

Last week, I preached on sacraments. We learned that a sacrament is an outward sign of an invisible reality. We saw that, not only are there the seven “big” Sacraments of the Church, but there are also countless “little” sacraments. The sacrament of the present moment would be one of those sacraments. It is always here, always inviting us to encounter the living God and to enter into an ever more dynamic relationship with Him.

To call the present moment a sacrament means that the present moment is an outward, tangible, experiential sign of an invisible reality, namely God's presence and love. This makes sense since the present moment is the closest experience that we have to eternity, whereas, there is nothing about the past or the future that are similar to eternity. Mark Mallett's image of the merry-go-round gives a great illustration of this concept. Mark puts it this way, “The merry-go-round revolves around an axis mounted in the ground. This is the shaft of *eternity* which passes through the present moment, making it a ‘sacrament.’”<sup>2</sup>

Our faith invites us to live in the present moment. This doesn't mean that history is not important or that we shouldn't plan for our futures, but rather, it is important for us to remember that we encounter God's love, forgiveness, power, presence, and grace only in the present moment. Knowing and remembering this fact helps us on our spiritual journey because it points to the moment of conversion.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.markmallett.com/blog/?p=404>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.markmallett.com/blog/?p=404>

Conversion can never happen in the past or the future. Conversion happens in the present moment. This is an important theme in the Book of Deuteronomy. The book is designed so that Moses speaks in the present moment. He doesn't dwell on the past or the future, but encourages the Hebrews to respond to God *now*, in the present moment.

Through the many addresses that Moses gives in the Book of Deuteronomy, he uses the word, "today" over fifty times (compared to six times throughout the other four books of the Pentateuch). He also uses the word, "now" frequently to reiterate his point. The Book was written so that each generation who read it would know that *now* is the time of conversion, *now* is the sacrament of the present moment, *now* is our encounter with the living God!

In our first reading today, Moses called the people to conversion, letting them know that renewing their Covenant with God was not too far beyond them. Notice his present-moment language—

For this command which I enjoin on you *today* is not too mysterious and remote for you. It is not up in the sky, that you should say, "Who will go up in the sky to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" Nor is it across the sea, that you should say, "Who will cross the sea to get it for us and tell us of it, that we may carry it out?" No, it is something *very near* to you, *already* in your mouths and in your hearts; you have only to carry it out.

-Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (*emphasis mine*)

Our wholehearted response to God's love must happen now, in the present moment. And, God is providing us with *everything* we need in the present moment to respond wholeheartedly to Him! Isn't that amazing! This is precisely what Jean-Pierre de Caussade points out in his book, "Abandonment to Divine Providence," (more recently know as "The Sacrament of the Present Moment").<sup>3</sup> In this 300-year-old spiritual classic, de Caussade explains how each moment is a sacrament—a visible sign of the, otherwise, invisible reality of God's presence and love. Father Jean-Pierre de Caussade writes, "For in the sacredness of every moment Divine Grace is telling you alone all that is required."<sup>4</sup>

This week, I encourage us to hear Moses' words as they were intended to be heard—in the present moment, calling us to conversion today, now. Some questions we might ask ourselves in order to prayerfully savor the present moment might include—In what ways have I been procrastinating in my relationship with God? Where do I tend to drag my "spiritual feet"? What have I been afraid to let go of in order to respond more wholeheartedly to God? What emotional hurts keep me living in the past where conversion is impossible? What hopes keep me living in the future? Who is God for me *right now* and how is He loving me?

### **SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:**

- ✚ Reflect on the "present moment" language found in Deuteronomy 4:1-8. What stirs in your heart when you read Moses' words?
- ✚ Read Deuteronomy 11:26-28. Moses is describing how the sacrament of the present moment requires our *response*. In what particular way in your life right now, have you noticed (i.e. discerned) that God is wanting you to respond to Him?

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<sup>3</sup> Jean-Pierre de Caussade was born in Toulouse, France, and was a Jesuit priest. In 1731, he was appointed spiritual director of the Jesuit retreat house in Nancy, where he undertook the spiritual direction of the Nuns of the Visitation.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.onelittleangel.com/wisdom/quotes/saint.asp?mc=308#2>