

GLIMPSE

Is God Watching?

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

I have been a slow-as-it-goes kind of jogger these past thirty-six years. While jogging along one gets in touch with lots of inner and outer things. For the first part of the run one notices easily the surroundings, sounds, sights, smells, heat, wind, inclines especially. At the beginning one can feel as if running could go on and on.

As time and length play out it seems one gradually notices inner movements, beyond blisters, limited lung capacities, leg-lagging and more than physical data. One can hear quite clearly a voice which announces itself as Reason whose words are so clear and accurate. "You have gone too far!" "That pain in your back needs surgery!" "People died running just around this same distance!" It is all very rational, but one gets familiar with these rational-lies and one learns ones limits; well, learns and relearns.

I have run a number of ten-kilometer races and there are usually many people cheering at the beginning which gets us going with excitement and determination. As the noise of their enthusiasm decreases mine soon does too and I begin listening to the little voices and tiny questions about why am I doing such a stupid thing so early in the day! Between mile four and five, there are no people cheering, not even the fellow runners. It is just flop-flop, clop-clop of rubber-bottom shoes and nobody standing along the curb cheering, encouraging, calling our names, and telling us we're looking good. None of us feels like we're looking anything but looking down and just a little ahead of the next flopping-clopping rubbered-toe. Ah, but near the six-mile marker and down the hill for the next quarter mile to the finish, other voices are welcoming us and our heads rise and the flopping-clopping becomes flip-slipping and there's more bounce to the ounce and we love being last perhaps in the race, but first in the hearts of the curb-side watchers. We all need encouragement from those closest to us, especially for the one-step-at-a-time marathons.

Bette Midler recorded a popular song, "God is watching us". The words which follow these nice words are, "from a distance". This bothered me when I heard the song in church and I pondered it all. Two questions arise for me. Is that all God does? At what distance does God do the watching? A third question is about why does God watch and what does God do with the watching? Maybe God does not want to

interfere. Maybe God needs objectivity in evaluating and judging. Maybe God does not want love to get in the way of accuracy. Perhaps God is watching from a distance so we grow in confidence and independence with our own strengths.

I recently was watching a Chinese mom and dad teaching their two children how to ice skate. The parents were in snow boots and were not watching from a distance. They allowed the children to fall, helped them up, encouraged them to watch the people around them who were skating so smoothly, and they of course, wanted to do more. They held hands, cheered them up and on and down and up-againies. Their distance was close.

God is not a spectator, note-taker, disgusted frown-maker. God is closer to us than we are to ourselves, but allows us to skate, fall, run, stumble, walk, choose, love or reject. God never does anything for us, or better, in place of us. God does not watch us, not even as closely as a loving parent. Love reveals, love does, love creates. God doesn't cheer for us like a divine curb-crowd, but is within as a small voice, not rational, logical, understandable, but livingly, forwardly, adventurously, relationally, reverently and keep-goingly. Someone told me recently, "All ends well, but when it does not end well it has not yet ended." I never have finished a race looking good, but "by God" I did finish, even though those little voices were so close and inviting. God is not watching you and me, God is Godding us from no distance at all. It is only a glimpse, stay close to your self.