

GLIMPSE

Let's Get Personal

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Two of my Jesuit brothers were walking along the beach near Santa Barbara, California. They met a man standing in the water fishing. One of these two asked the man what the name of this river was. The man looked quite annoyed and replied, "This ain't no river, this is the (blankity-blank) Pacific Ocean." In mock surprise and apparent disappointment, the smart-aleck Jesuit replied, "Hmm, The Pacific Ocean, somehow I thought it would be bigger."

I recently was speaking with a person who was worried about his relationship with his long-term woman-friend. After a bit of time, he simply stated that the "spark" was gone. He could not describe the "spark" exactly. It had something to do with the sense of romance, though he still enjoyed spending time with her. I asked him about how he felt about himself when he was in her presence. That slowed him down quite a bit. He eventually admitted that he was finding things about himself, when with her, that he'd rather not know. Somehow he thought he was going to be better and, by her being his special friend, he was being revealed to himself.

We all have *expectations* about the more personal things in our lives. The word comes from the Latin, (look-out) or "watch-for". We are always looking out for the "spark" or that certain something. Very few things about others, about events, about ourselves fulfill our *lookings*. The term "romantic" when applied to literature describes a type of writing which denies the limitations of actuality. When applied to a person, he/she loves the spark which looks past human failures in hopes that they will vanish because of the relationship. The closer we get to the reality of the other, the more the limitations of his/her actuality will be difficult to deny.

In our relationships with God we find out all those actualities which can move us to be more concerned with them than with the relationship itself. We become quite assured that God is viewing us in the same way as we are viewing ourselves. Somehow God thought we would be bigger, better, gracier. So this is the framework which we look-through. Our expectation is that God is definitely not a romantic, but an investigative realist, concentrating on our being smaller, worser and too real to be known and loved. God is a Divine Spark Whose very nature is more than feeling. In listening to people who do pray I find a sense of disappointment and darkness, because somehow they thought, over time, they would constantly experience that Spark and it is their fault and faults that smother the spark. Our expectations of how we should feel in prayer or because we pray, either in private or communal prayer, can be so romantic that we get depressed at our own reality and actualities.

Prayer is a relational matter and not to be measured or evaluated. Obviously we would love raptures, (whatever those are) and as in loving relationships we would desire intense intimacy and belonging. It does not take long in any interpersonal relationship to have the reality of limitations become a partner in the relationship. So too with God. I may have had a couple, a fleeting couple, of real, honest, intimate experiences of God's being this close. Mostly God is

that-near, but it is real as long as I stay real in my expectations of God. I cannot make God come as close as I would wish and if God did that, I would have the expectation that God come even closer. That is just the way we are and God is.

People always get in trouble when they trip over the barrier of their too-lofty expectations of themselves or the other. It is only a glimpse and somehow I thought it would be better.