

GLIMPSE

Listen for the Ducks

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Meeting people is only the beginning of relating with them. Many meetings are literally, 'bumping into them'. Like billiard balls, we bump, glance and then roll away to meet others bouncingly. I have met personally with some famous others who, I am sure, do not remember the encounter. I met Billy Mills who won a gold medal in the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo in the ten thousand meter race. He is a member of the Lakota people of South Dakota. He put the winning ring on my finger himself. I witnessed the wedding of Terry O'Reilly, a famous hockey player for the Boston Bruins, and so got to meet other very famous hockey players. I was like a little kid. I even granted Pope John Paul II an audience of thirty seconds. He didn't seem too impressed with my few words of Polish, learned from having grown up on the south side of Milwaukee. Ah how fleeting is fame.

Relating is more than meeting. In meeting we 'bump' into and then off. In relating we move from knowing the other to knowing ourselves. The deeper the relationship, the deeper we meet ourselves. The duration, then, of the relationship depends upon whether I increasingly like what I find out about the other and whether I like what the other moves me to experience about myself. I have a very close friend who once was trying to face me with something I didn't want to know about myself. I turned my face away and this friend reached out and pinched my nose and turned my face toward, not just the person speaking, but even more importantly, to myself.

Good relationships then are interpersonal exchanges. I assist you and you assist me in loving ourselves through knowing ourselves as we are. Some relationships end because one or the other does not like what is being revealed as true. We can worry about whether or not we will be liked when we are so known and revealed. Truly loving is based on accepting in the other, that which the other finds hard to accept and love in themselves.

I recall being on my own prayer retreat and walking along a road in northern Wisconsin. I was reflecting about things I did not like about myself and how I had not been the perfect Jesuit priest during the past year. I had been living with other imperfect Jesuit priests, but I was okay with that and with them. I was

grumping along, face bent toward the gravelly road, when I heard two ducks flying close above me making quite unusual duck sounds. They did not "quack-quack", but rather "waah-waah-waahed" as if they were saying, "Quit that nonsense, you won't be any better by your own "waah-waah-waahing". I looked up as they flew along the same road, saying the same thing to me as they distanced and disappeared. That was more than a meeting, because I kept looking upward and I knew that God was doing more than meeting me. God was deepening my relationship with me.

God can use persons, ducks, and simple prayer-time to raise our faces up toward God and toward the truth that sets us free from grumping along the roads of our own imperfections. Jesus was always meeting people where they would rather not be. They were wishing to not be blind, lame, leprous, hungry, or fishless as in the case of Peter. Jesus met the two men walking away from the Jerusalem community in Luke 24:13. They were downcast, looking at the gravelly road toward Emmaus, and Jesus asked them what they were "waah-waah-waahing" about. The meeting was the beginning of Jesus' deepening a relationship which had begun, but was now giving them more about themselves as well as of Jesus Himself. It seems the way God works. God will come to us any way God finds it possible to catch our attention.

We will, at times, want to turn away from what is deeply our truth and that which is hard to accept. Our truth is not true if it is faced outside of God's loving us in and with that truth. As with good friends, God loves us the way God finds us, but loves us enough not to leave us alone in that truth. Listen for the ducks, watch out for the persons who pinch your nose. Be careful with those who want relationships with you, and with God of course. They might just want you to love yourself including your "waah-waah-waahs". It is only a glimpse, no more grumping please!