

GLIMPSE

Listen to the Echoes

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Of all things, the duck's "quack-quack" is, for some reason, the only sound that doesn't echo. We have all probably listened to children listening to their own voices bouncing back to their delight. Doing this persistently would make parents wish their children were ducks at times. Echoes have different meanings. They can be sounds, memories, traditions as well as stories. Echo has her own history.

The very sad story or myth about the wood-nymph Echo plays quite a part in our present-day culture. She was lovely and a lover of loving and being loved. One day she caught sight of a handsome male figure upon whom she threw herself. Accustomed to being loved in response, she was devastated by the cold-shoulder she received. She apparently cried and carried on so that the gods took away her body and her ability to speak except to say back whatever was said to her. Maybe she never heard of a duck's quack. There are several variations of this myth, but always the same result.

Ah you say, but what about the dandy who rejected her? His name is Narcissus. His problem was not just with Echo, but he was convinced that nobody could ever love him as he deserved and desired. One day, he had worked up quite a sweat warding off various nymphs and spirits so he bent down to a near-by pool for a drink. As he drew near to the water he could see a face looking up at him which was so lovely and inviting he reached down to grasp it and the reflection was shattered momentarily. He was shocked that he could not possess the loving beauty he demanded. Soon the waters calmed and he reached in once more with the same results. He deserved, was entitled to, the possession of the only love which was worthy of him.

So the story goes on and on as Narcissus lay withering away with unreachable love. The story is that he eventually died of trying to love himself and being loved by himself and in time a flower grew up bearing his name. Not only does Echo linger in our human experiences, but we have met the echo of Narcissus ourselves. I heard recently that the reason the taking pictures of one's self is known as "Selfies" is that they did not know how to spell Narcissism. This human fascination with the self has various characteristics.

I would say we all have these to some degree and maybe have one or two more than a little bit. Narcissus could love only his image, not his real self. He was self-important to the exclusion of others. He was preoccupied with physical beauty or profile. For him, power, importance and a preoccupation with impressing others had power over him. He was not to be seen as having any physical limitations. He excluded himself, because no one else could live up to his high standards of success or stature. His wishes had to be executed as a sign of others admiration. There was none worthy of loving him, because he could not find love within him.

I fear a "spiritual Narcissism" in myself and within the Christian Community. Self-examination is healthy; self-scrutiny leaves us lying paralyzed with disappointment. Receiving our day-to-day creation from the responses of others leaves us with an unquenchable thirst for that which is always unsatisfactory. When we cannot recall the validations, acceptances, accomplishments and experiences of being loved in our pasts, the present and future will be nothing more than times of strangling reality for temporary self-aggrandizement.

We look into the face of God in Whose image we are formed. We see God reflected back to our faces and images. We are blessed to be a blessing and a continuation of God's creation of others. Our holiness is to be expressive rather than impressive. We will do what we think we are and the "why" is more central than the "what" we do. God has told us who and what we are. We are tempted toward the pool of self-verification, but the saltiness will move us toward the pond of self-acceptance. It is only a glimpse, be sure to listen to the echoes.