Seeking, Finding and Abiding

The Threefold Dynamic-Relational Process of God’s Love
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<td>AG</td>
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Introduction

About two years ago I began my long retreat with an intense desire in my heart akin to that of St. Anselm's\(^1\) to seek God, find Him in my prayers and ultimately abide with Him when I find Him. But as I progressed slowly into the retreat I found out that my determined desire was actually God's, in the sense that in my own seeking of Him He seeks me, to find me and abide in and with me in an intimate manner of loving that has drawn me to Him.

God was constantly and actively seeking after me, finding me and abiding in and with me. It could have been enough for me to know that in the end His great desire was to eternally abide with me in love. But the process by which He did it was noteworthy for it was equally touching and powerful which is proper to its active dynamism showing God's ever-present longing to be with humanity.

Looking back on my studies in Theology, I realized it was precisely this constant process of lovingly seeking after, finding and ultimately abiding in and with human persons that God creates the history of our salvation. In appreciation, I shall personally reflect on this relentless threefold dynamic-relational process with the Parable of the Lost Sheep (Luke 15:8-10) at the background and use this as a lens to see anew the faith we profess in a God who yearns a life of communion with me and with all of humankind.

Primal Abiding with God

_in the wilderness... - Lk. 15:8_

Within God we can discern the infinite dynamic-relational process of seeking after a beloved inevitably finding love in return, revealing an absolute mutual exchange of love that eternally abides. In the utter mystery of the life of the Godhead (CCC 234) love

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/anselm-proslogium.asp
exists so powerfully and abundantly so that our God is rightly called “Love” (1 Jn. 4:8). The mutual exchange of love in God reveals to us the mystery of a relationship in God, disclosing unto us the three equal and distinct persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. “The divine Persons are relations which subsist in the divine nature” (CCC 1327). On this, Augustine writes, “[God] is not called Father with reference to himself but only in relation to the Son; seen by himself he is simply God.” John Paul II writes that the Holy Spirit is the “Person-Love” (DViv 10) in the relationship of mutual exchange of love in the life of the Triune God (CCC 1324). Indeed, the Holy Trinity is a mystery of “personal loving communion” (FC 11) as fully revealed by Jesus Christ.

The overabundance of love in God and the intense longing to freely share that love is the very force behind the act of creation. He creates to seek and establish a relationship of communion and intimacy outside Himself “so we can get to know and love Him” (CFC 101). This is symbolically presented in the story of the primal abiding in the Garden of Eden (representing harmony even with creation!) of God with humanity (God walks and talks with humans, Gen. 3:8) who is freely created with reason and freedom above all creatures, “to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life” (CCC 356). However, with humans’ abuse of their freedom through disobedience (see Gen. 3:1-11; Romans 5:19; CCC 397) the intimate relationship of humanity with God and the harmony with the entire creation was disrupted. Thus, sin enters the scene.

Sin is the deliberate turning away of humans from the abiding love and presence of God similar to the running away of a sheep from the pasture in a “verdant wilderness.”

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3 “The ‘wilderness’ here is not the sandy desert, but the open uncultivated pasture land (in Mk. 6:35,39 “wilderness” and “green grass” are mentioned together in the same passage as describing one such pasture land).” Nil Guillemette, SJ, *Parables for Today, Exegesis-Reflections*. (Makati: St. Paul Publications,
But humans choose to escape from it and so the bond is broken! And experiencing the effects of this break, the people of Israel articulated their understanding and reflections on it in Scriptures through the archetypal stories of sin telling us of the rupturing of that intimate harmony with God (Adam and Eve eating the fruit of knowledge, see Gen. 3), with the self (wanting to be like God, see Gen. 3:5-6), with one another (Cain and Abel, see Gen. 4) and with the entire creation (toiling for survival, see Gen. 3:17-19,23).

**Seeking after and Finding the Strayed to Bid them Return**

* [God] goes after the lost one until he finds it. — Lk. 15:4b

In the human flight from God’s abiding love and presence, God never turns His back on us; rather He seeks us insistently with concern and asks, “Where are you?” (Gen. 3:9). He does not take away His presence and love when He finds the sinful human (see Gen. 3:10) but abides more persistently and even promises salvation (see Gen. 3:15) symbolizing His forgiveness. God’s offer of forgiveness intensifies His seeking after His beloved creatures who—when He finds them—are invited back into a relationship with Him. In seeking them God is like the shepherd seeking the lost sheep (see Ez. 34:11-16). He is like the prophet Hosea calling back his prostitute wife Gomer (see Hos. 2-4). God takes the initiative to persistently “seek the lost...lead back the strayed...bind up the injured...strengthen the weak...” (Ez. 34:16).

In His seeking the lost, God forges a covenant with Abraham whose descendants constitute His very own people (see Gen. 17:3-9; Hos. 2:25) who received the partial revelation and the initial blessing of being found and abided with for all the nations (see Gen. 17:5) who will be gathered “into the unity of the Church” (CCC 60). God

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1987), 231. In the pasture the shepherd abides with the flock and the flock abides with the shepherd revealing, as it were, a symbol of the intimate relationship of God, the shepherd, and humanity, the flock.
continually renews and ratifies the covenant with the patriarchs indicating His continuous invitation to return. But then again humanity through the people of Israel turns away from God, rejects the invitation and seeks to worship other gods (see Hos. 3:1). And yet, in spite of the people's infidelity God remains desirous of abiding in love with His people and so seeks them relentlessly by sending prophets to remind His people of His faithful love for them, His great mercy and His unwavering fidelity to the covenant.

God makes His dwelling among His people and remains in their midst in a tent filled with His glory (see Ex. 40:34-38; Num. 9:15-22; 2 Sam. 7:6-7). But His desire to seek oneness, to find absolute unity and to abide definitively with humanity went even further by pitching His own tent and dwelling among us (see Jn. 1:14). He became one with us in all things but sin (see Heb. 4:15) through the Incarnation of His Son.

**Incarnated Abiding Love of God**

*(And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders... - Lk. 15:5)*

God has sent his only beloved Son (see Mt. 3:17; Mk. 1:11), Jesus Christ, to incarnate, express and reveal perfectly His "seeking love," which shares with us His divine life, His "finding love," which offers us forgiveness and His "abiding love," which introduces us into the very life of communion with God.

Through the humanity of Jesus, God abides with us as Emmanuel, God-with-us (Mt. 1:23), and "in a certain way unite[s] Himself with each [of us]" (GS 22). The divine united itself to the human in Jesus empowering humans to participate in the life of the divine (see AG 3). In his becoming human Jesus transformed from within our nature to accomplish our salvation (CCC 461), to re-orient our inner disharmonies to God, to reveal to us the immense love of God, the depths of our being and the intensity of our
capability to love. Also, the Incarnation enables us to seek and follow Him closely towards the fulfillment of God’s kingdom.

The Kingdom of God, which is “a dynamic symbol of God’s active [abiding] presence among His people,” is the center of Jesus’ teaching and preaching (CFC 481). It propels the “liberation and transformation” (CFC 675) of the world in view of restoring the possibility of intimate relationships and the reality of “personal loving communion” between God and humankind. It is a kingdom of communion and the conversion to it begins with the seeking and finding of the sick and the sinner, of the lost and the least, of the broken and the outcast. Then, they are carried back on the shepherd’s shoulders to the abiding love and presence of God where their sins are absolved and purged, their being is uplifted and made whole, their dignity returned and protected, and their life incorporated into and conformed to that of Jesus.

Jesus seeks, finds and abides with those who are lost (see Lk. 19:10) in obedience to His Father’s will so that through Him all people should have access to the Father, in the Holy Spirit, and thus are brought to light (see 1 Thes. 5:5; Eph. 5:9). They become sharers in the divine nature (see Eph. 2:18; 2 Pet. 1:4), and have life abundantly (see Jn. 10:10). But Jesus has done it in ways that scandalized and affronted many in his time because of the radical transformations His ways brought to broken relationships and divisive realities in their society, and for these He was made to suffer and put to death on a cross.

Jesus’ passion and death are charged with meaning for they expose the great desire of God to be in communion with us even in the most vulnerable condition of our humanity. Jesus’ death brought everything in and of humanity to a new level of existence
so that death is not anymore the end but the beginning of a new life—"the fullness of life" (EV 2) in God. Therefore, through the obedience of Jesus even unto death (CCC 615), the salvific plan and will of the Father was fulfilled and perfected (CCC 599, 601, 613). This fulfillment enabled humanity to partake again in God’s life, to accept God’s mercy and to be in communion with Him. For this reason, God raised Him up from the dead after three days as a “confirmation of all [His] works and teachings” (CCC 651). After fulfilling and perfecting all God’s seeking, finding and abiding with His people as the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:1-17), Jesus ascended into heaven carrying our humanity on His shoulders and brought it home with Him in eternity⁴—so that now “immortality takes on its meaning as communion with God and with the whole of reconciled mankind.”⁵

The ascension of Jesus gains for us a newness of God’s seeking, finding and abiding love and presence through the sending of the Holy Spirit. God’s Spirit awakens the faith in us, communicates to us the new life obtained for us by Christ (CCC 684), unites us to Christ (CFC 1307), reminds us and instructs us of Christ’s teachings (Jn. 14:26). It is through and in the Holy Spirit that Jesus will remain seeking for us, finding us and abiding with us, as He promised, until the end of time (see Mt. 28:20b). But He left a command to His disciples: “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit...” (Mt. 28:19) to fulfill the promise of gathering His people from all nations into the unity of the Church (see Jn. 11:52; 10:16; CCC 60).

Perpetuating the Invitation
...[H]e will call his friends and neighbors together... - Lk. 15:6a

The Church, inaugurated by Jesus Christ through His life and the preaching of God’s Kingdom (LG 5), and given birth by the Holy Spirit (CFC 1301) during Pentecost (see Acts 2), receives from Christ the life, teachings and mission of Jesus and transmits faithfully this whole reality in the spirit of inculturation to other generations through the Sacred Scriptures and Sacred Tradition (DV 8). The Church is the people gathered into a life of communion with God where His abiding love and presence reign and where the Holy Spirit animates them for the mission to call and invite others to experience the communion. Thus, “the Church is both a sacramental sign and an instrument of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind” (GS 42; LG 1).

As God’s instrument to foster human solidarity as well as ecological health, the Church has taken social Advocacies and humanitarian actions that promote justice, love, peace and integrity of creation (PCP II 79-80). She also seeks and finds means to tear down all forms of division that “impede authentic communion” (CCC 1394) through a continuous and constant invitation to other religions (NA 2) and Christian communions (UR 1) in a dialogue as “possible collaborators” (GS 22) in transforming the entire world and the entire creation into something new in Christ! (see 2 Cor. 5:17)

Through the Church’s witnessing, preaching and celebrating in her liturgy (SC 26f), and particularly through the sacraments, intimacy with God is made ever active and present (CFC 1467). By means of these the Church perpetuates not only in memory but also in tangible realities the ever constant seeking, finding and abiding of God with us. In baptism God abides with us by infusing His very life into us (CCC 1239). Confirmation strengthens this abiding with Him and with His Church for mission (CFC 1626). But in
times of weakness and failure God seeks us to offer hope, joy, peace and courage to continue the faith-journey in the sacraments of reconciliation (CCC 1468) and the anointing of the sick (CCC 1520). In our commitment to a life of communion, to our call to invite into it and to its prolongation we are empowered and called to the frontlines through the sacraments of Matrimony and the Holy Orders (CCC 1534). And that which would really sustain and nourish us in our every endeavor, which is also the best concrete expression in the here and now of God’s desire to dwell and abide with us, is none other than Jesus Christ Himself in the Holy Eucharist (CCC 1374). All of these have but one ultimate effect in us: grace, which is God’s seeking-life, finding-self, and abiding presence and love – God Self-giving in us – transforming every fiber of us into Himself, emboldening us to seek and find Him and bridging for us our response in our vocation to abide with and in Him.

**Eternal Abiding love of God**

*Rejoice with me for I have found my lost sheep. – Lk. 15:6b*

With the lost sheep resting on the Shepherd’s shoulders and finally in His arms close to His heart and with all those invited gathered together for the rejoicing at the finding and return of the lost, let us not forget how the sheep allowed itself to be found after its own futile seeking of the way back home. By just lying on the ground while bleating\(^6\) in the hope of being heard, it waits, in utter trust, for the rescue of the Shepherd. This is the important fiducial dimension of faith! This is how we are invited to respond to God. And this faith should penetrate every bit of our being as our self-gift to God.

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As Christians, we have Mary as the best model of faith (CFC 1437). She responded faithfully to the invitation to do the will of the Father, which she had always been seeking and finding and abiding with all her life. Even if the consequences were uncertain she assented trustfully to it in a very personal and integral way so that she was rewarded with the privilege of being the first to be indwelt by the incarnate God. In view of this, she received the gift of being immaculately conceived (ND 704) and was assumed into heaven body and soul (ND 713-15), reminding us of our original dignity and final destiny.

Our destiny with God, His longing for humanity, is to infinitely abide in love with us and the entire creation recapitulating everything in Himself (see Eph. 1:9-10) in a new dwelling place—“the new heaven and earth and the new Jerusalem” (see Rev. 22) - where we will walk and talk again intimately with Him without any division and distance (see Gen. 3:8). In this dwelling place the threefold dynamic-relational process will be ultimately perfected in the form of an eternal abiding love characterized by eternal communal rejoicing for the coming home at long last of the lost one.

Conclusion

The seeking, finding and abiding of God is also concretely seen in little instances of human seeking propelled by love to find and abide—instances which arouse our faith, touch our hearts and inspire us to move our hands and feet. On this note, allow me to end this perspective of our faith by sharing a story.

In November of last year, many hearts were touched by a picture and story of a certain Mrs. Aurelia Matias who tirelessly sought her lost senile and erstwhile unfaithful
husband. The picture and story became a “viral” phenomenon on Facebook and mainstream media because it awakened the deepest longing of human hearts for and the profound conviction of faith in unconditional love, which the wife had for her husband, but most importantly, which God has for each of us.

The seeking for the husband became not only the solitary task of the old lady but it also took a communitarian form, for it involved many in actively searching for the old man. This happened, I believe, because of the inspiration of the powerful common experience of seeking to love springing from that “seeking love” of God for us, challenging us to move and meet Him in His seeking for us and to join Him in seeking for the lost.

When the wife was asked why she wanted to seek and find her husband, she affectionately said, “Not only because I want to see him but because I still want to love and serve him more.” And this motive is very much God’s own motive for seeking and finding us – to share His life with us, abide with us, commune with us, serve us and save us with His boundless love and life in Jesus.

So many celebrated with Mrs. Matias when after a couple of days Mr. Matias was finally found and brought back home. Now, may we also rejoice and celebrate with God in our own journey home into His “eternal abiding love” as we meet and find Him on the road of our own seeking of Him.

In the end we only have this to say: “Rejoice, because in all God’s seeking it is us whom He seeks; in all His finding it is us whom He finds; in all His abiding it is with us that He abides. For, indeed, we were lost but now are found and brought home at last. Rejoice!”
Bibliography


