

Conversing with God in the Cool of the Evening...

A few years ago I was guest chef for a community project for the elderly in central London and was cheekily billed as *The Naked Curate*- a pastiche on the success of Jamie Oliver as *The Naked Chef*. I hadn't cooked on such a large scale for well over fifteen years so accompanying the lamb cobbler into the ovens were plenty of prayers! Since then, I have reflected on *prayers* and *naked* both of which have a huge relevance to healing and spiritual growth.

At the beginning of the Bible we find one of the most beautiful and profound pieces of ancient writing; the Book of Genesis. The text gives the reader amazing reflections concerning the creation in its infancy. The text mentions that Adam and Eve, the first people, conversed with God in the cool of the evening- *naked*. They weren't in the least bit uncomfortable when they did so. Although the text is not explicit, it is reasonable to assume that God walked naked too; God had nothing to hide from them. God and humanity were completely open to one another.

As we know, the narrative goes on and Adam and Eve disobey God. How did God know? God noticed they were unexpectedly ashamed of themselves. '*Who told you that you were naked?*' questioned God. The serpent had promised them that their eyes would be opened. What did they see? What they immediately saw and felt they needed to hide from God was *themselves*.

Healing and spiritual growth arise from introspection and prayer. There are numerous ways to pray and of course endless distractions. We are only truly successful in prayer, however, when we are possessed by the same un-self-consciousness that our first parents Adam and Eve had who, without giving their nakedness a second thought, walked in the cool of the evening with God. Mirroring Adam and Eve's later experience, what makes prayer so difficult very often is not facing God but *facing ourselves in God's presence*. It is challenging being completely

naked, entirely open before God, and seeing ourselves as we are- both beauty and brokenness. St Teresa of Avila said, *'it is absurd to think that we can enter heaven without first entering our own souls; without getting to know ourselves'*. It is because of our unwillingness to see ourselves as we *are* that many of us do not often reach the intimacy of walking with our Lord in the cool of the evening.

There are many tools to help to learn more of ourselves and to open ourselves more fully to God, but primarily it is through prayer; through being with God. We can best gauge our love for God by how simple and honest we are able to be before God. Our prayer pleases most when we are completely open; when we are simply naked before God without another thought.

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