

GRATITUDE

(By David Whyte; adapted by Chaplain Donnel)

Gratitude is not a passive response to something we have been given, gratitude arises from paying attention, from being awake in the presence of everything that lives within and without us. Gratitude is not necessarily something that is shown after the event, it is the deep, a priori state of attention that shows we understand and are equal to the gifted nature of life.

Gratitude is the understanding that many millions of things come together and live together and mesh together and breathe together in order for us to take even one more breath of air, that the underlying gift of life and incarnation as a living, participating human being is a privilege; that we are miraculously part of something, rather than nothing. Even if that something is temporarily pain or despair, we inhabit a living world, with real faces, real voices, laughter, the color blue, the green of the fields, the freshness of a cold wind, or the tawny hue of a winter landscape.

To see the full miraculous essentiality of the color blue is to be grateful with no necessity for a word of thanks. To see fully, the beauty of a daughter's face is to be fully grateful without having to utter a required "thank you." To sit among friends and strangers, hearing many voices, strange opinions; to intuit inner lives beneath surface lives, to inhabit many worlds at once in this world, to be a someone amongst all other someones, and therefore to make a conversation without saying a word, is to deepen our sense of presence and therefore our natural sense of thankfulness that everything happens both with us and without us, that we are participants and witnesses all at once.

Thankfulness finds its full measure in generosity of presence, both through participation and witness. We sit at the table as part of every other person's world while making our own world without will or effort, this is what is extraordinary and gifted, this is the essence of gratefulness, seeing to the heart of privilege. Thanksgiving happens when our sense of presence meets all other presences. Being unappreciative might mean we are simply not paying attention.

(Today and this month of July, may we have the eyes, the ears, the awareness to pay attention. May we be awake to grace, to love and beauty around us.)

*From *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*

