

PRESENCE – THE ACT OF “BEING THERE”



Betty Anne Brown
National Chairperson of Resolutions

Jesus was the presence of God on earth, "...and they shall name Him Emmanuel, which means 'God is with us.'" (Matthew 1:23) Jesus, as God with us, walked and talked with us and showed us how to be with one another – open, honest, trustworthy and safe. When He was about to leave the earth, He gave us the gift of the Eucharist so that His divine presence would remain available to us.

Presence means to be here and not somewhere else. Do we consciously practice presence in the moments of each day? Are we fully there or are our minds far away? Are we really listening to the other person in our encounters or are we planning our next statements? Can we be attentive to the meaning hidden behind the silences of the other person? This takes time, proximity and a concerted effort to channel our time. This is what contemplation is, being fully present to God in the moment. Have you tried it? It isn't as easy as it sounds.

A pregnant woman and her developing baby experience an intimate presence with one another. The effects of this invitation to life will change the course of their world. Think of Mary as she awaited the birth of her Baby. Imagine the awesome privilege of their being together in the moments leading up to His birth!

At the Visitation, Mary rushed over the hill country to be present with her elder cousin, Elizabeth. Walking with a friend, you are being there for one another. Gradually you open your hearts, comments are exchanged, troubles are discussed, and no force is exerted one over the other as you share the moment. Over time, problems resolve themselves and the way becomes clear.

In family life, a certain order exists. The parent is a dependable presence for the child. The child learns this parameter and gains his/her security from it. Within this safe place, the child can grow and experience the maturing process of life. In times of illness, presence helps the healing process. Animals have no other agendas, other than just being there. It has been noted that pet dogs and cats help people recover faster from surgery. In the companionship of old age, very often silent for hours, a contented serenity emanates and perfumes the surroundings.

Recently I attended a two-day government conference with two other League members. We did not know each other really well, but our hearts were "rooted in gospel values" and burned with the League's "call to holiness through service to the people of God." We greeted each other warmly each morning, and then went to our various workshops. We would meet for coffee and share a few insights. At lunch, we gathered with these familiar faces and often with a new friend. We shared the excitement and anticipation of new things to be learned. We were present to one another without judgment, expectation or demand. At the end of the day, we bade farewell with the hope of seeing each other again the next day. Quite simply we experienced presence, just "being there" for one another, and that gave us courage, enthusiasm and enjoyment of what could have been a rather dry, formidable event.

In our volunteer work in the community, so often we hear of the importance of our being "at the table." When we take CWL resolutions to government, we realize that our presence is so important. This opportunity to share ideas, ask questions and make recommendations, and to experience the give and take of being there in an open, respectful atmosphere, ultimately enriches our civil society.

Recall the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and focus on the encounter between Jesus and the woman. Do you sense that their presence to one another changed her life? Think of the work of good counsellors. What do they do? They walk with the troubled. Their presence allows their clients to feel safe enough to be honest, open their hearts in a safe place, and face their fears and sorrows. Then growth can happen. The clients are transformed, never to be the same again. New lives have begun.

The suffering experienced by those who grieve often stems from the absence, the lack of presence, of the beloved. So at this time, friends offer their presence in the hope of consoling and helping the affected person over the rocky path of transition.

What is the price tag on presence? Just your time. *Love One Another* by the gift of your presence that we may renew the face of the earth. ✠