

WHERE DO YOU BELONG?

by Fr. Al Demos

As a young boy I always felt a sense of "wanderlust". It is very hard to explain this feeling. I never ever felt that I really belonged anywhere; I was just there, wherever I was, with family and friends, but I knew I belonged somewhere else. There was always a sense of distance and far away lands, which I would study and visit. So I would ask myself, "Is there a place where I belong?...Is there a place I ought to be?...Is there a place where I could communicate with The Creator on a deeper level than I had ever known before?"

The seminary was a place to belong and to be for seven years. And though I have traveled a little and served in various areas as a priest, I think I may have finally found my answer. It is written in Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God!" I have found that this is a divine directive which is essential to attaining the wisdom of the mystery of life. It must be obeyed! To be still and allow oneself to be carried away to that state of marvelous precious peace and spiritual awakening. No effort is needed...no attainment needs to be reached...simply be still - sweetly, gently stated - to listen for God's voice.

In today's world we hear of transcendental meditation which aids mind, body and soul. But this form of meditation has a soothing hypnotic effect, rather than a spiritual awakening. As believing Christians we seek oneness with God...we seek the Holy Spirit in a relationship which is intimate in our reaching out to seek Him who invites us to accept His eternal, all-embracing love. "Come unto Me all you that labor and are heavy-laden", says the Lord.

We are invited to go to that place where we ought to be and need to be...to that place where we belong, by our loving God and Creator.

It is in this silent holy place where we can meet Him as never before - for each time we come to it, the experience becomes more profound...we come closer and closer to Him - understanding and experiencing more and more of the mystery of His love. But to reach Him there we must empty ourselves. We must come to Him with an attitude of unknowing - holding no preconceived expectations. We simply go there to love and adore Him...to trust Him with total confidence...to be open to His softest

whisper...a whisper which contains the wisdom of the greatest mysteries of the universe.

Orthodoxy teaches that God dwells in all peoples - both believer and unbeliever alike - because of His Divine Love. What we seek is to find that mysterious fountain of light, of knowledge, of life, which dwells within us...awaiting to enlighten us...to transform and transfigure us from within. What is required of us is our sincere desire, our undivided attention, our silence, our faith, our hope and adoration!

Often, we will not be aware of what is happening to us -- for even as we cannot perceive the day to day growth of our bodies...as we cannot perceive the changes in our daily molecular replenishment, we cannot always perceive those minuscule spiritual growth spurts which slowly blossom, gently unfolding like an ever-blooming flower of light from deep within.

So we - as Christians who struggle to grow in our faith and in our relationship to God - go about our daily tasks, often wondering as we go, asking those same questions - "Is there a place that I belong...a place where I should be?" Our Lord Jesus Christ says, "Yes! Yes, you belong to Me...you belong with Me! That is why I came to you -- to open the way for you to come to Me!"

Christ is not fickle...He doesn't come and go - leaving us - as we arise from prayer to go about our mundane tasks. *He is always with us!* He is never changing, ever-present in our hearts. The real question is -- are we with Him?

I have traveled to 47 of the 48 Continental United States, to 18 countries, most especially to Greece and France. And never yet have I found a place where I ought to be or where I belonged. As a student in the Seminary I watched carefully as our chapel was constructed brick by brick. I was so proud of the fact that I had helped to raise funds to build this chapel as a member of the Church Youth group in Chicago. So every day I was the self proclaimed overseer who examined every step of construction from the foundation to completion. I can still see the foundation, then the walls being built up, the paint, the roof, the Icon screen, the rug, the chairs, and the pews. I see a hundred faces of comrades who are more than brothers to me. At one point I climbed the scaffolding into the dome while the cement was

still fresh and wet. I wrote in the dome, "Al Demos loves Jesus Christ". So when I go there I always look up and remember. When I look back I think of myself then as a very young, inexperienced and self-centered person. Now I regret that I just put my own name there. I wish I had written, "Jesus Christ loves all the world, and may all who pass through here teach the world to love Jesus Christ." I now know that these latter words are better written in our hearts than in cement- and that is the challenge of all the students who come to Holy Cross -- to bring to all the world the love of Jesus Christ.

I have come to understand the process a bit better now by using the powerful grace which God gives in silent prayer which allows us to center on Christ - to bring His ever-presence into our conscious awareness. It is in silent prayer that we become aware of His Holy presence and of our need to truly move our life closer and closer to Him each day. Do you really want to know where you belong? Do you really want to know where you ought to be at this point in your life? Then look *within* yourself - *listen* quietly and carefully to what God is saying to you...hear what is already written within your heart..."Be still and *know* that I am God!" In this statement of confidence and faith...in this simple statement...lies the most profound mystery of the whole universe, for you to share with all the world. You know that He is God....Be still...and listen!