

In Remembrance of Brother Philip

Christmas Eve, 2013, will mark five years since our brother Philip's Pascua or Passage to New Life. The grace of his life among us is still deeply present and gifting.

Recently, a personal reflection he wrote in 1992 surfaced serendipitously. The excerpts from it on the following page speak eloquently of the experience of Incarnation in his life and challenge us to a profound thanksgiving and praise for the grace of Christian life in community.

This brief schema of brother Philip's life experience sets the context for his reflections:

- *The struggle and pain of self-acceptance.*
- *The suffering and challenge of illness and bodily limitation.*
- *Lost his mother as a child, then his father; orphaned as a young teenager and raised with his sister, Margie, in a difficult extended-family living situation.*
- *As a young man, exaggeratedly polite and deferential; in community, he matured into a self-affirming, confident, self-giving and loving person.*
- *Physical limitations and diminishments: epilepsy, excessive blood iron, both hips replaced, back surgery, ankle fusion, progressive and aggressive arthritis, ALS.*
- *Challenged in body coordination, yet a good dancer; a lover of books; a gifted writer; blessed with a beautiful singing voice; a composer of poetic lyrics for the community's music and prayer.*
- *Attuned to justice and peace issues; sensitive to prejudice of any kind, especially racism, homophobia, and towards persons who are challenged, disabled, or overweight.*
- *Amidst it all, a wonderful sense of humor.*

Excerpts from Brother Philip's Personal Reflections

*Remember the struggle of becoming,
how we grapple with the substance of life,
waiting for a ripeness that lies in far-off autumn.¹*

Catherine de Vinck

THIS IS NOT REALLY A TEXT TO BE READ, BUT AN ACT *of praise and thanksgiving*. It is more like a song to be sung. It is not a song of accomplishment, though, but a melody sung in the middle of the journey. It makes no sense apart from the path.

I have learned this song while walking, step by step. The song, at first, was very brief; but as the walking has continued, so has the song unfolded. Yet, neither the song, nor the journey, is done.

I have not composed this song alone, on my own, but have discovered it holding the hands of precious friends, brothers and a sister. For you, I am very deeply grateful. (You know who you are!)

The words are my own voice; the song has become mine; but it links me to every other person. We are *all* sojourners, wayfarers, journeyers.

Our feet provide the rhythm, our hearts the melody, our lips the words, our hands the strength. And God provides the way.



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Affirmations

As a human person, I have been created in the image and likeness of God, and to live *as* an image of God. I am called to bear God in the world. As a human being, and part of the web of creation, I am good.

As a human person, as an image of God, my continuing creation and unfolding is graced.

I have been called into life in order to *love*, in order to realize and fulfill my communion with all reality, and in a special way, with other persons.

¹ from Memorandum 66 in *A Time To Gather* by Catherine de Vinck, © 1967, Alleluia Press, Allendale NJ, p. 66

As a human person, and as an image of God, I am called to love in a way that is uniquely me, in a way that bears the gift of my *self* to others.

As a person created in love and called to love, I am *embodied* in order to fulfill that vocation. My particular body, in its mystery and its challenge, its joy and its pain, enables me to live humanly.

I feel like Jacob, who, in struggle and embrace, experienced the encounter with God in a very powerful, bodily way.

The night visitor said to him, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you strove with God and with humans, and prevailed." Jacob called the place Penuel, because, he said, "I have seen God face to face, and I have survived." The sun rose as Jacob passed through Penuel, limping because of his hip. (Gen. 32: 28, 30-31)

Jacob, a model of graced vulnerability, of vulnerable gracefulness!

As a human being, I accept the challenge of affirming the giftedness of who I am. I want to live out of God's free acceptance, affirmation, and love for me. Therefore, in response, I am self-affirming. This includes the responsibility to give voice to my own experience.

I am an adult, committed in mutual, loving covenant with my brothers, in this community. With them, I seek to be a follower of Jesus. I seek to be more freely self-giving, faithful, and other-enriching.

My Practice

... I begin to understand how the pain and personal struggle in my life have made it possible for me to develop virtues and strengths, which become gifts for others. My personal struggles offer me a God-given opportunity to experience life from a non-dominant position; to question assumptions; to care deeply about persons, and less about roles; to grow in empathy with others' pain and joy; to be able to listen; to be attuned to what unites, rather than what separates; to celebrate the unquenchable scandal of Jesus' table fellowship, rather than domesticate it.

And not only that, we boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Rom. 5: 3-5)

"Those who hold on to their lives will lose them."

As I respond to the grace of letting go, I am more certain, than of anything else, of God's word to me, "I have *always* loved you."

"The gift you have received, give as a gift." (Matt. 10: 8) ■

brother Philip
25 March 1992