

**17th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 27, 2008**

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The opening prayer at today's liturgy is what most caught my attention in preparing a homily. It is one of the more stunningly beautiful, optimistic, thoroughly Ignatian prayers of the year. (Perhaps I was so struck remembering that in only a few days we will celebrate the feast of our patron, St. Ignatius of Loyola.)

The prayer asks for the grace to just pay attention to aspects of life that too often pass unnoticed, or just get taken for granted. It invites us to live—even if just for a moment—in the now. Right now. I think of a small book that has sold millions of copies around the world over the past ten years. It is called simply *The Power of Now* by Eckhard Tolle. Pause and breathe. [Go ahead, breathe; it shouldn't hurt.] Be here now and...

Listen again to the church's prayer—just in case it floated by without too much notice a few minutes ago. “Gracious God, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation.” St. Ignatius says: watch and listen to how God labors throughout all creation in love. In love for you and me, God labors. This world—out there and in here—is not just a dazzling finished product from eons ago. Creation itself continues to labor in love to produce

such splendor.

Breathe again—and even through our stained glass see the splendor of a single leaf lining Thomas More Drive; see the trees sway in a gentle breeze; hear the rustle of the breeze; feel the sun; smell the flower. Let God open your eyes. That is the church’s prayer today.

And it continues: “Gracious God open our eyes to see your hand in the beauty of human life.” We can all see too often the darkness, and the suffering, and the cruelty of human life. We are almost programmed to fixate on all that goes wrong, on all that seems so dark. I am reminded of a short poem by Mary Oliver called “the Uses of Sorrow.” It reads: “Someone I once loved gave me / a box full of darkness. / It took me years to understand / that this, too, was a gift.”

The prayer continues: “Touched by your hand, our whole world is holy.” The whole world—not just the gentle parts, or the beautiful parts, or the agreeable parts. But the whole world: the majestic and powerful parts, the awesome aspects, even the dreadful shocks of tremendous events without comprehension. All is holy by God’s hands. To borrow from theologian Rudolf Otto: *Deus fascinans and tremens*, God always alluring and shimmering with delight; yet God always awesome and tremendous in sheer

power.

Ignatius says: Spend just a moment in the Trinity of love as they look upon the void and replicate their own identity in love. And from the mythical Ignatian heights, above the universe itself, the world in all its splendor, in all its holiness, appears. This whole universe, and all in it—including us—is touched and holy!

Our prayer continues: “Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us.” Help us to share all these blessings with each other.” Help us to experience the joy of life in your presence, aware of your presence.

Breathe again. And with the ancient Psalmist, and with St. Ignatius, ask yourself in the breath: Who am I that God should have created me, little less than the angels, and given it all to me in love?

Can we ask for the same wisdom and understanding of Solomon in his prayer today? Can we know with St. Paul that truly “all things work for good for those who love God?” In this gentle moment of Now, can we wonder with Jesus for what would we sell all we have? Or search out the one pearl that would make life all worth while?

Brothers and Sisters, it is all gift! Even the darkness. Don’t make the mistake to pray to ask God to change even one thing. Pray to have the

**courage to change yourself; to have the courage to live with eyes and heart open, aware of the gift, and breathing always in the Now. St. Ignatius says:
Amen!**