

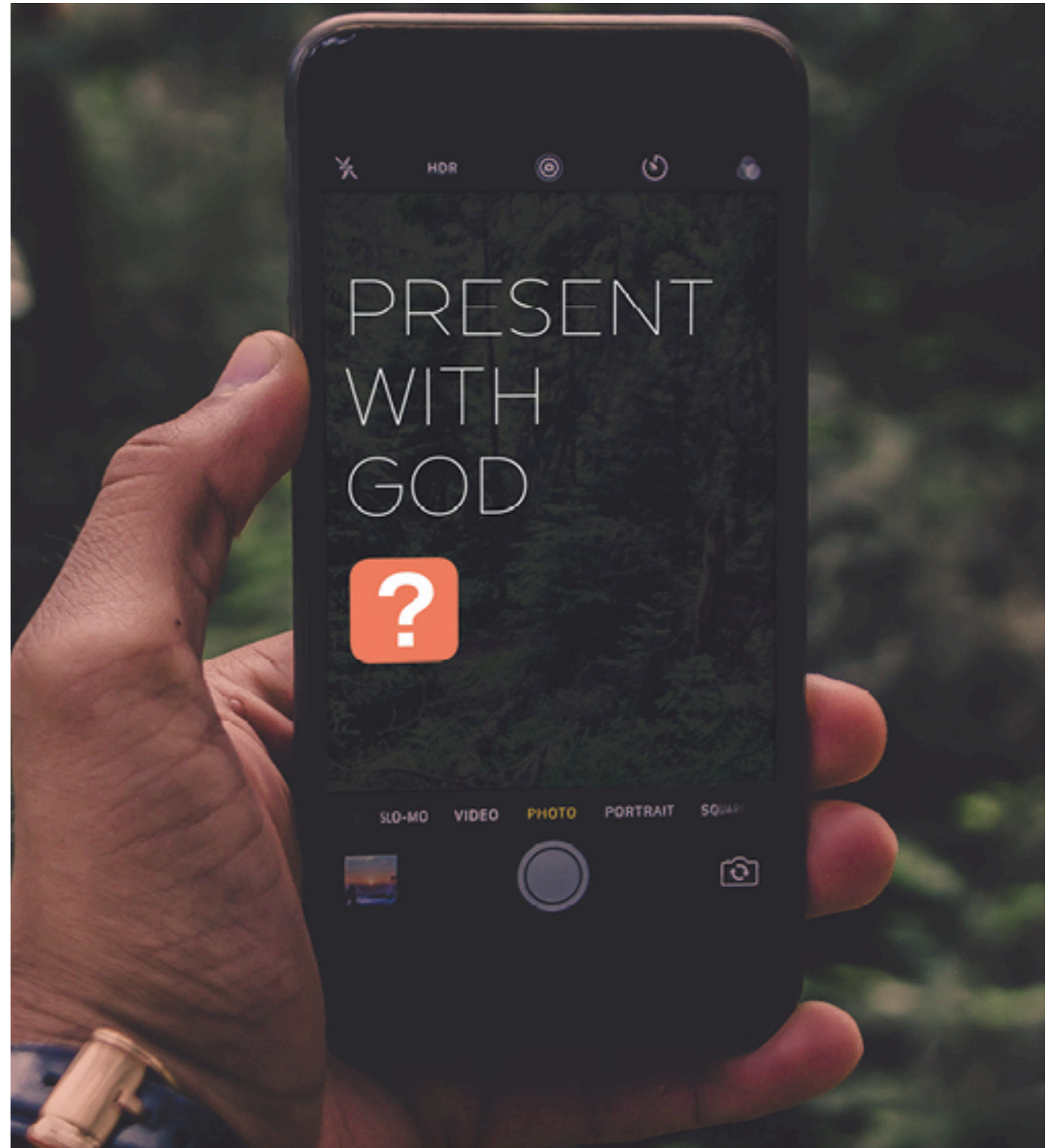
Presence!

Being Spiritually Present to God

Now with circuit breaker period, we may find ourselves with ample *Time to Pray* despite working from home. Here are some things Catholics say about prayer. If you have any of these problems or have voiced any of these complaints, you are a member of a very large Catholic fraternity.

Sitting Still

There's something about our contemporary culture - we find it very hard to **SIT STILL** for any duration of time. We have lost the art of solitude. No time for contemplation.



Stillness: Checklist...

- I can't sit still - and *why* should I?
- What's the deal about a *relationship with God*?
- Does my prayer feel like a to-do list for God?
- How can we have a relationship with someone we can't see?
- I don't know what to say ... prayer is boring!
- What's the point of saying the same prayer over and over again?
- I haven't learned any new prayers in years.
- My words feel superficial
- I am just too lazy to pray
- I don't know how to pray
- Others



Here's a brief background on the idea of **presence**. Adam and Eve “heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8). The Hebrew word for presence is “*Panim*” or Face. It connotes a personal relationship.

A relative admires your *zeiser panim*, your sweet face! *Panim chadashot*, new faces. At a Jewish wedding, the participation of *new faces* renews the joy of wedding celebration. Simply showing up isn't the same as being “present.” One of the most interesting ideas of *panim* is seeing God's face or being face to face with God. Samuel also encountered *the “Panim”* Presence of God. Hannah, his mother's intention was that Samuel “may appear in the presence of the LORD, and remain there forever ...” (1 Samuel 1:22). Face-to-face with God - for Samuel's entire life.

The presence of God is not confined to “religious” building, a room, or temple. God's presence is wherever God is. He is with us all day, every day and every night, right? This is a key point. The idea of spending 5-10 minutes in stillness before God sounds good. But most of us cannot just not think about anything. Any time we try to quiet our mind, we start singing a hymn or thinking of a Bible verse. We want to be still in God's presence, but it's so hard! We can't seem to stop the buzzing in our head, and it's frustrating! Cultivating a habitual sense of God's Presence is not a zen-like meditative state where our minds disconnect from our bodies. That's not in any way biblical.



Rather, the goal is to **allow the peace of God to rule in our minds and hearts by submitting all we are to God and allowing His stillness to refresh our souls**. Our contemporary culture is geared toward measurement; promotions, grades, getting the part, acceptances - we end up bearing the cost in our bodies, minds, and spirit, of a perpetual cycle of never measuring up. We are overcome with *comparison fatigue* as we carry the weight of comparison. We are prone to judgement,

participate in bitter resentment, and become agents of a divided world: winners and losers, top and bottom, inside and outside, right and wrong, those who make it and those who don't. In this fast-paced society, we rarely get to experience stillness and peace. But countless scripture text speak of the importance of *resting in God's Presence*.

God's Stillness

Oh God, I need a stillness,
Deep within my soul,
That I may feel You ever near,
Though troubled waters roll.

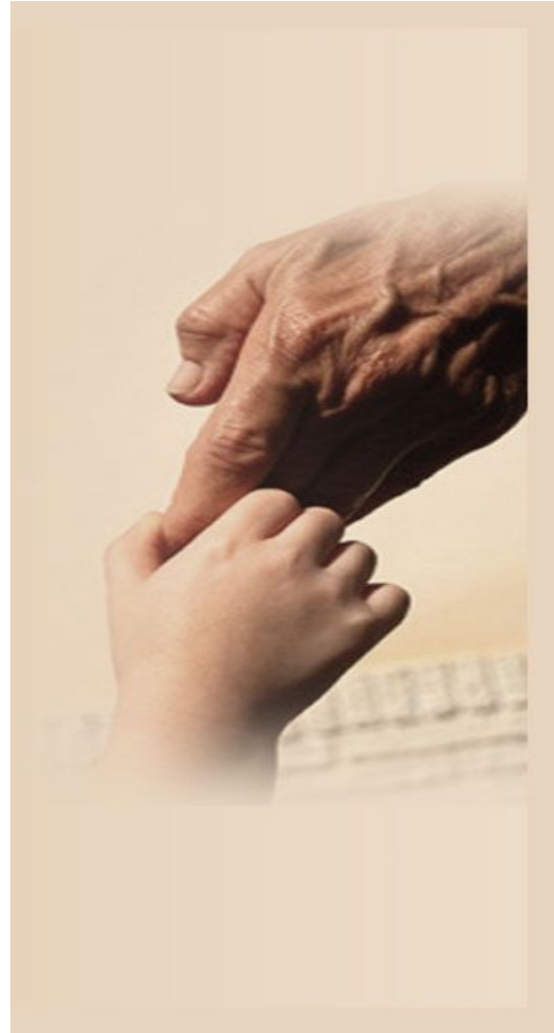
Oh God, I need a stillness
To wait more patiently.
I know You hear my longing cry.
I know You'll answer me.

Oh God, I need a stillness
To meditate and pray,
A time to get to know You, Lord.
Much better every day.

Oh God, I need a stillness,
My dry soul to renew.
I need Thy Holy Spirit's power
To fill me through and through.

Oh God, I need a stillness
To know Your perfect will,
To walk the path You'd have me walk.
To hear, "My child, be still."

~ Helen Dowd ~



Carving out a Sacred Space for Prayer

We must build into our usual daily schedule time spent with God. Even if it is only the practice recommended in the *Didache* (the Lord's teaching) of reciting the **Lord's Prayer** morning, noon and night, that is better than leaving everything to chance. If we are serious in our commitment to God, we need to uphold the commitment with regular prayer. It is a matter of setting up some structures that ensure that we stay in touch and do not become strangers to God.

The choice of a place of prayer is a very personal one. Some people prefer a place that is warm, dark and confined, a womb in which they are enveloped by a prayerful ambience. Others respond best to open space and an abundance of light so that they are drawn out of themselves into infinity. Some like a space that is empty; others find it helpful to make use of sacred symbols, images, icons, candles, etc. Some find solace in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and pray best in a church, others create a little prayer corner of their home to serve as an expression of their faith and a focus for their prayer. Some people find that nature is a good ambience for prayer.

Having a habitual place to go to when we pray simplifies the transition into prayer. When we go to that place on a regular basis we will often find that our thoughts follow our footsteps and we move into prayer and **STILLNESS** with greater ease.

Prayer is not primarily our work, it is the result of the Holy Spirit working within us, bridging the distance between us and God. We don't have to stage-manage our prayer, but simply make room for it to happen. Letting go of everything that occupies our mind and heart and opening ourselves to the action of God - ***"Be still and know that I am God"*** (Psalm 46:10)