

Looking for God's Footprints Introduction

An Experience

Looking for God's Footprints is a way in which, in conversation with others, we try together to discover the God of life.

We share what moves us: inspirations, experiences, and events.

We try to interpret these in faith as God's call or challenge.

As we do so, we enter into the Old and New Testament tradition of faith. The Bible bears witness to the fact that God's Spirit accompanies us faithfully. He is behind everything and works in everything.

Looking for God's Footprints guides us to feel and perceive the inspirations of the Holy Spirit in and around us. Just as a windmill captures the wind and converts its force into energy, so what we discover in our hearts, what we discover in the world around us and the signs of our times, has to be understood as "God's voice". It should give us the strength and energy to answer this voice in our lives.

Looking for God's Footprints is based on the conviction that we can discover signs of God's presence everywhere – in what lives within us, in the people we meet, in creation, in the small and great events of history, in developments in science and technology.

Looking for God's Footprints is a process that started in groups and communities belonging to the Schoenstatt Movement. It developed out of their "practical faith in Divine Providence", through which they tried to search for and find God in all people, things and events.

Looking for God's Footprints is a spiritual path that can be followed by

Small groups:

After the introductory prayer, a member of the group reads out the accompanying text step by step, and in this way leads the members through a time of meditation.

Church and social committees:

At the beginning of a meeting, the members review the road they have travelled together. They interpret what they have discovered together and find in it inspiration for future action.

Couples or families:

At the end of a day they either follow up the events of the day step by step, or else review the previous week, or other period of time, together.

Individuals

can adapt the steps of looking for God's footprints to suit their circumstances.

An Invitation

*I would like to welcome you to this introduction to **looking for God's Footprints**.*

- The first section presents the *process of looking for God's footprints*. The individual steps of this form of meditation are explained, and practical suggestions are given for putting it into practice.
- This is followed by a period of *reflection*, during which the Biblical and theological foundations are presented.
- In the final section we show how we can look for *God's footprints in the midst of life*.

At the end of each chapter ideas are given for further reflection and discussion. The chapters can be read consecutively, or dipped into here or there.

**Looking for God's Footprints
in Practice**

1. Walking a Biblical Path

The disciples on the way to Emmaus *looking for God's footprints*

The steps by which we *look for God's footprints* take their bearings from the Bible. They appear in many Biblical stories in some way or other. We can see them particularly clearly in the account of the meeting between the two disciples and the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24, 13-35). The headings given to the four steps of *looking for God's footprints* highlight the connection.

- **Step 1: Remember**

On Easter Sunday “two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all the things that had happened.” (Vs 13-14)

- **Step 2: Share**

“While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, ‘What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?’ They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him ...” (Vs 15-24)

Jesus approaches them and encourages them to tell him about their concerns.

- **Step 3: Discover**

“Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory? Then ... he interpreted to them ...” (Vs 25-27)

Jesus helped them to interpret what had happened in the light of faith. However, they only discovered the meaning of his words and the events at the breaking of the bread:

“When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’” (Vs 28-32)

- **Step 4: Answer**

“That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. ... Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” (Vs 33-35)

Invitation to walk the way of the Bible

Looking for God's footprints invites us to accompany the disciples on the way to Emmaus and an encounter with God and Christ. On the way we will discover God's footprints in our own lives.

- In an introductory prayer we ask for the grace to be attentive to **God's presence in our midst**.
- We **remember** what we have experienced in our lives.
- We **share** this with one another.
- We try to **discover** in the light of faith what our experiences could mean, and what God is calling us to do through them.
- We search for the **answer** we can give to God's call.
- We praise God in a **prayer of thanksgiving** for the gift of his presence.

Footprints

Which elements of this "searching for God's footprints" do I know from other incidents related in the Bible?

2. Introductory Prayer

Searching for God's footprints begins with an introductory prayer:

“Lord, we ask you to make us attentive to your presence in our midst. Send us your Holy Spirit to teach our hearts to see and hear, and to guide our thoughts.”

Being attentive to God's presence

The aim of this prayer at the beginning is to direct us inwardly to the purpose of *looking for God's footprints*: We want to become aware of God's presence and nearness to us. We believe that God always accompanies us and leads us by his Providence. Yet we think all too rarely about this in the course of the day.

We can contribute something to this attentiveness by making time for God. Nevertheless we cannot just create this attentiveness; it is ultimately a gift from God.

The presence of the Spirit

God becomes present in our midst through the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ promised this “Spirit of truth” to his disciples, and at Pentecost he sent the Spirit as the Comforter to lead them into all that he had taught them.

That is why we also pray for this Spirit, so that, unlike the disciples on the way to Emmaus, our eyes may not be blind. Our hearts have to see and hear; they have to become attentive. We pray for the Holy Spirit, so that he can guide our thoughts as we search for meaning in what we have experienced in our lives.

In the community of believers

Looking for God's footprints is designed to help us to seek and find the signs of God's presence and companionship in our lives as part of **a community**. To be a Christian always means being a sister or brother in the community gathered around Jesus Christ. Sisters and brothers help and strengthen one another in the faith, and make one another aware of certain experiences. They search together for God's will and the answers to the “questions” God puts to them through the encounters of everyday life.

This does not mean that I, as an **individual**, cannot follow the steps of *searching for God's footprints*. Of course I can do so. For example, at the end of a day I can place myself in God's presence while I look back over the day and try to discover his footprints. Yet even as an individual I am at always part of the larger community of the Church, so I search as a member of the Church. In my faith I am upheld by this community, and I also help this community when I *search for God's footprints*.

POINTERS:

- *Looking for God's footprints* is geared to initiating an inner **process that needs time**.
If we start off on this spiritual road with a community of about eight people, we will need about three-quarters of an hour for each meeting. Couples or individuals will need correspondingly less time.
- It is helpful to appoint someone at the beginning to take on the position of **host**. He or she prompts the next step, and sees to it that the following pointers are observed.
- **A short period of silence** before the introductory prayer helps those present to become recollected. Then the host can start the introductory prayer.

3. First Step: Remember

The first step in *looking for God's footprints* concentrates on our personal experiences.

“What has impressed, touched, or even hurt me particularly in the past few days?

In silence I allow these experiences to come alive once again within me.”

I look at what happened to me in the past few days, or just today. This could be:

- Experiences with myself, or with other people
- Experiences in and with nature
- Local, national or international events, or political developments
- Events reported in newspapers or on TV
- Surprising or everyday experiences
- Joyful or oppressive experiences

Everything has an effect on me

Everything I perceive, either consciously or unconsciously, has an effect on me. Events or people awaken either positive or negative memories in me. Surprises in the little world of my life, or in the great world of politics, can arouse joy or anxiety in me. Encounters with others, discussions, telephone conversations, either private or at work, can give rise to annoyance, anger or sadness.

If we take as our starting point that God is close to us and accompanies us through things that actually happen in life, it means that we have to take our personal experiences seriously and consciously think about them. As we reflect on our experiences, the awareness can and should grow in us that God wants to speak to us through what has happened. This awareness grows all the time. He wants to talk to me, he wants to tell me his wishes, he wants to urge me to act. Such a way of reflecting on our experiences is very different from constantly centering on ourselves, or being wrapped up in our own lives.

The healing power of remembering

When we recall events in the past, it has a healing effect on body and soul. Remembering can be compared with spiritually “digesting” our experiences, which would otherwise lie around in disorder in our souls. They then become a burden. Remembering is hygiene for the soul!

Also, and very specially, our difficult experiences need to be looked at carefully, even if it hurts. This does not mean constantly opening up old wounds. Many

things simply have to be left alone for a time. However, all this needs to be done in God's presence.

POINTERS:

- The host fixes the **length of time** – e.g., five minutes – during which the members of the group can reflect on their experiences.
- I then concentrate fully **on what is going on within me.**
- I allow my experiences **to pass before my mind's eye.**
- Since it is impossible to reflect on them all at once, **I choose one of my experiences** that I want to look at more closely. When I make my choice, I have to be sure that I can talk about it in the next step of *looking for God's footprints.*

4. Second Step: Share

When we take the second step in *looking for God's footprints*, we share our experiences with the others.

“What do I want to tell the others?
I share what is important to me.
I listen attentively to what the others have to say.”

The Church is a sharing community

The Church came into existence because people shared their experiences with Jesus Christ with others. At Pentecost, after he had been strengthened by the Holy Spirit, St Peter went out with the other Apostles to proclaim to the people that Jesus had risen from the dead (Acts 2,14-41): “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (Vs 32).

The history of the Church is a missionary history (Latin: *missio* – act of sending) and hence a history of preaching about God's great and wonderful deeds (Mt 28, 16ff.). The Apostles confessed: “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4,20).

So proclaiming the word is an important part of every Eucharist. We are told about the experiences of believers in the Scriptures of the Old (first reading) and New Testament (second reading).

The sharing community today

The history of God's dealings with human beings did not come to an end with the compilation of the Bible. God accompanies us on our path through life down through the ages.

So it is a good thing to tell one another about the “holy scriptures” of our actual lives. I tell others about how God has spoken to me and touched me in the people I have met and the experiences I have had. I bear witness to others about how God is at work in me and the world around me. And the others tell me what they have experienced in their lives. Since I can be certain that God accompanies every person on their path through life, I listen attentively to what the others have experienced.

In this way we strengthen each other's faith as we *look for God's footprints* in our lives. We begin to realize that living by faith upholds not just our own life, but also that of others. Faith then becomes more real, more tangible, more believable.

POINTERS:

Each member of the group needs to observe the following guidelines. If necessary the host reminds the group tactfully about these:

- When we take the second step of *sharing*, we **talk about our lives** without being indiscreet. So each member has to decide responsibly about what he or she wants to contribute. Self-advertisement should be avoided.
- Each member has **three minutes** in which to talk about his or her experiences. If they exceed this time, the host asks them to close their contribution so that others can have their say.
- The fundamental attitude of the group members at this stage of *looking for God's footprints* should be **to honour** the life and dignity of the person who is talking. So no one should try to interrupt the speaker. If necessary the host can point out: "At this moment we don't want to discuss our experiences, only listen to them."

5. Third Step: Discover

In the third step of *looking for God's footprints* we try together to discover the meaning of one or the other experience in the light of faith.

“What struck me particularly in these recollections?
Where can I intuitively perceive God's footprints in what I have heard?
Where do they show that he is close to us, or reveal his beauty, his guidance, his wishes, his challenges, his incomprehensibility ...?
Does the Bible offer an inspiration or answer?
I can discuss this with the others.”

Searching

The most difficult step is that of discovery. How is it possible to discover the wishes of the One who said of himself: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways” (Is 55,8)? That is why the spiritual process of *looking for God's footsteps* talks about looking or searching. Every attempt to interpret our lives remains a matter of feeling our way, or surmising, we can rarely know it with certainty. Often we can only discover the meaning of God's guidance in retrospect, long after something has happened.

This was the case in the most central event of our faith. Many people experienced Jesus' death on the cross, many heard of his resurrection. Some came to believe in it, others shook their heads and said: “We will hear you again about this” (Acts 17,32).

The same thing happens with the little events of our personal history. Some experiences spontaneously give rise to joy and gratitude, because of God's closeness to us and his guidance. With other experiences we can often only put up with the challenges and incomprehensibilities of life, and sometimes we can only accept them much later.

How do we discover the meaning?

Now how is it possible to discover the meaning of an experience, and at least surmise what God's will could be? How can I clarify whether and why God is speaking to me through this experience? While being critical towards myself, how can I ask what my experiences mean?

The criteria for the “discernment of spirits” can help us. They will be discussed in a later chapter. At this point let us consider some guidelines:

- It is helpful to compare our experiences with experiences in the Bible. Which Biblical account, or which Biblical text, such as a passage from the

Psalms, offers an interpretation of my experience? What directives and correctives are offered by the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount?

- During our discussion, we could help one another by offering new ideas. Often we are so caught up in our experiences that we can't see beyond them. An outsider can often see things we overlook, and this will help us in our search.

POINTERS:

- This step of discovery is intended to be a **meditative conversation** in which we respect one another's suggestions and similar experiences. Discussions, or even a know-it-all attitude, need to be avoided.
- Often it is not possible to go into all the shared experiences in detail. A **selection** is possible and helpful. Perhaps one of the group has shared an experience that is also important to others in the group. This could then be reflected on at greater depth.
- The host can **steer the conversation** in this spirit, and indicate a point that needs special emphasis. If a particularly difficult experience is related, the host can suggest that the group merely listen to it and then let it rest.

6. Fourth Step: Answer

If we understand our lives as God's invitation to us to enter into conversation with him, it means that God is also waiting for our answer. So, in this fourth step of *looking for God's footprints*, we try to find answers.

“What do I feel urged to do – to thank, to question, to complain, to ask, to give, or to change myself or something else?
I quietly reflect on what I want to do.
As a group we can also decide on what we want to undertake together.”

The answer of love

Love always challenges us to love in return. Love does not ask: “What do I have to do now?” Instead it asks: “How can I answer your love?” If in faith I presuppose that God's guidance is an expression of his love for me and for all humankind, my question will become: “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

- Joyful experiences will make me feel urged to thank God, and to praise him for going with me in my life.
- If I suffer under an experience and cannot interpret it, I will turn in prayer and put my questions to God.
- After painful experiences I will express my lack of understanding at God's way of doing things, and complain – as we often find in the Psalms – about my situation, or perhaps even protest. These are genuine emotions and feelings, which I can and may present to God.
- Often I am unable to change anything in my personal situation, or in the needs and concerns of others. I can only bear with them. Nevertheless I am not powerless and helpless. I can set my hopes in God, and pray for myself and for others.
- *Looking for God's footprints* can also lead to changes. These changes could affect my life, my lifestyle, my attitude to life. They could challenge me to stand up for others, or champion a certain cause.
- It is precisely in this step of finding an *answer* that we see that faith requires daring. There is always an element of uncertainty. Have I interpreted the signs given to me correctly? Is the way I believe I should take really the right one?

For many, perhaps for most of the things that happen, I will have to find a personal and individual answer. However, some experiences could also be

discussed that apply to or take in other spheres of life, such as the parish, the school, work, an association or club. It would then be meaningful to tackle it together, to initiate action, or support an undertaking.

POINTERS:

- It is a good idea if each member of the group spends some time silently listening to their inner voice, in order to discover a **personal answer** to an event, and hence to God's call.
- I can also ask the others in the group **for help**: What do you think would be a good answer in my situation?
- If a common experience has been discussed, the question can be: What we would like to do about it **together**?
- The host should ensure that everyone who wants to make a contribution is also heard, and that no one is pressured into talking. If a common experience is involved, the host can introduce the discussion by asking, for example: How can we tackle it together? How can we answer what God is saying to us?

7. Prayer of Thanksgiving

Looking for God's footprints ends with a prayer, just as the meeting of the disciples with Jesus in Emmaus ended with a prayer of thanksgiving (Lk 24,28-32).

“Dear Lord, we thank you for the gift of your closeness to us.
We pray for the strength to do what has to be done, and for the patience to accept what we cannot understand.
Together with Mary we pray: ‘My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour.’”

Thanksgiving

In a brief, three-part prayer, we first thank God.

- We thank God for the experiences we have had, and which we have shared with one another.
- We thank God for being close to us in these experiences, even when we have not always been able to feel his presence. Our faith, which sees God accompanying us in everything, helps us to overcome the barriers and limitations of our experience.
- We thank God for the gift of his presence and closeness.

Petition

God's loving care for us needs to be answered. Yet, from experience we know that an insight into the truth, or even good resolutions, do not necessarily mean that we will act accordingly, or bring about change. So even in our answer we depend on God's help.

- We ask for God's strength, the Holy Spirit, so that we can carry out in practice what we have resolved to do.
- Since we are unable to interpret so much of what we experience correctly, we ask for patience to bear what we cannot understand. We need this patience in particular when we are suffering, when we are burdened by cares or illness.

Praise

We conclude our *search for God's footprints* by praising him. We could formulate this praise spontaneously, but we often feel that our own words are inadequate. So it is helpful to turn to the great worshippers in the Bible, who also searched for God's footprints.

Mary has a special place among them. Her union with the living God was so deep and intense that she was privileged to bear within herself, and give birth to God's most important and perfect footprint, Jesus Christ. If we are to unite ourselves time and again with Mary in prayer and praise, we have to develop an attitude of openness and readiness, which so distinguished Mary. That is why the Church prays the *Magnificat* every day at Vespers. It is Mary's hymn of prayer and praise that gave expression to her joy as she visited her cousin, Elizabeth (Lk 1,39-56).

POINTERS:

- When the discussion has reached a conclusion, the host can invite all present to join in a **concluding prayer**.
- This prayer can be freely formulated and could refer to one or the other **point on which the group has reflected**. It is also possible for each member to formulate a personal prayer expressing their intention.
- The meeting concludes with the **traditional prayer of looking for God's footsteps**. If the members of the group have no experience in formulating their prayers spontaneously, a prayer of thanksgiving on its own can conclude the session of *looking for God's footsteps*.

**The Book of God's Footprints
The Bible**

8. The Question about God

Images of God

The word “God” is one of the best known and most used concepts in human history. As soon as people began to think about their lives, and tried to express their thoughts in words, God entered the equation in one way or the other – as an explanation for what they could not understand, or for what surpassed their own lives, for events that gave rise to fascination or fear, for the mysteries of life and death.

However, the concept “God” is not unambiguous; it never has been. Almost everywhere we find the idea of a “Supreme Being”. Yet, the way people imagine this being, God, is always connected with the circumstances of their lives as individuals and communities, that is, their economic and social conditions. People’s self-image, and the way they live together, also influences the image they have of their God.

Closely connected with their faith in God is people’s search for the meaning of life and their hope for the future. God is the Creator of their lives, he upholds them, he guides and accompanies them on their way through life.

God in our society

In our pluralistic and secularized society and civilization in the West, faith in God is in crisis. Many values and explanations of life’s meaning exist side by side, and are seen as equally valid. Individuals and groups look for what will give meaning to their lives from the selection of elements on offer. From what they find they often create their own religion and idea of God.

If all that is on offer is equally valid, it is easy to suit yourself. Then religion loses its convincing power, and people can pick and choose. Fundamental values, such as faith in God, gradually evaporate. Life is then merely secular. People experience increasingly that God is less and less real, until finally the concept is merely understood as a metaphor, or saying.

Where do we stand as Christians?

In this pluralist situation Christians and the Christian Churches have lost their monopoly as interpreters of the meaning of life. They are no longer seen as representatives of the faith. They have to take a stand to the whole range of interpretations on offer, and cope with competition.

There is an Indian idiom that tells us: “when the storm of change is approaching, some build walls and others windmills”. The reaction of Christians is just as varied. Some suffer from anxiety in this situation, and hide themselves behind the walls of “the good old times” and tradition. Others look for God’s footprints in the signs of the times and the changes taking place. Without forgetting where they have come from, or their tradition, they ask where God is leading them.

Footprints

- *Where have I experienced in the world around me that people collate and construct their interpretation of life from various traditions and religions?*
- *Where do my convictions come from?*
- *What is my reaction, and what are the reactions of other Christians, to the confusing multiplicity of opinions and convictions in our society?*

9. The Fundamental Message of Christianity

Defining our position

If we look more closely at the various intellectual and spiritual currents in society, we will realize that all is not lost for faith and religion. We can observe tendencies and longings that correspond fully with the Christian message: the cry for freedom, for the right to decide for oneself; the search for an authentic life; a feeling of scepticism when it comes to exercising power over others; the search to make as much as possible of our lives.

Here Christians can take the initiative and testify to their faith convincingly – the message of the freedom of God’s children; their commitment to working for others in the spirit of love for one’s neighbour; the possibility of becoming involved in working for truth and justice in our society, and finding fulfilment in this expression of our faith.

If this is to succeed, we Christians need to define our position clearly. What do we believe? What is our hope? What is our outlook on the world and our philosophy of life?

Christian faith is more

Christian faith is more than what people can collect from human wisdom and knowledge. St Paul tells us that “the law” of God is written in human hearts (Ro 2,15). That is why, despite all cultural and religious differences, people can agree with one another on important fundamentals such as human rights. Nevertheless, Christians believe that through Jesus of Nazareth God has revealed himself uniquely to human beings, in order to bring about a decisive change of direction in the world and human history.

When, in the tradition of the Bible, Christians profess their faith in their God, it is because they are answering their experiences with this God. In Jesus Christ they have come to know the one, living and true God. Jesus of Nazareth showed in word and deed who God is and how he is.

The heart of the message

The heart of the Christian message is already proclaimed in the most ancient professions of faith, for example, as we find in the Letter to the Romans:

“The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart; because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the

heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved.” (Ro 10,9-10)

- Jesus Christ is invoked as the “**Lord**” (Kyrios). As the Risen Lord he left his footprints in the lives of his disciples. He is the “Messiah”, whose coming they were awaiting, and so he is the Judge of the living and the dead (cf. Acts 10,41; 2 Tim 4,1).
- At the heart of our faith are God’s great deeds, his footprints in world history: God, who lives and works, **has raised Jesus from the dead**. Through the resurrection God gives everyone new life. Everything that can defeat us has been overcome, in particular sin and death.
- The message promises salvation and justice to everyone who **professes Jesus**, that is, who trusts God in their hearts and bears witness to others with their lips that Jesus is Lord. This message has left its mark on history.

Footprints

- *On which signs of hope do I build my life?*
- *What role does Jesus Christ play in the way I live, and my outlook on the world?*
- *How and when do I reckon that God really can change my life in a positive way through Jesus Christ?*

10. God Answers Human Longings

Longing for God

“O God, you are my God, I seek you,
my soul thirsts for you;
my flesh faints for you,
as in a dry and weary land
where there is no water.” (Ps 63,2)

The composer of this psalm compares his longing to know God with the needs of his body. Just as the body cannot do without water, so he longs for God to be close to him. Just as parched land longs for water in order to be able to bring forth new life, so human beings long to be allowed to live in God’s presence.

This prayer may have been formulated and prayed at a time of acute need. At the same time it says something about human beings as such – there is a deep longing within us for God. The word “soul” signifies the whole person, who reaches up to God and thirsts for him.

This is the way human beings were created

The Bible takes this longing for God for granted, because “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1,27).

As God’s image, human beings are God’s representatives in creation. As created beings they point towards the God who created them. When they deny this God, they miss their actual purpose. If they want to realize their full potential, they will only do so if they reflect on the fact that they are made in God’s image. They can only develop their full “humanity” if they are faithful to their divine origin, and when they take their bearings from the will of their Creator.

When people feel a constant restlessness within themselves, when the things of this world are ultimately unable to satisfy them, those words of St Augustine prove true: “You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you”. When people feel that they want more, when they long for more than they can see, or than they can grasp with their hands, the reason is to be found in their origins and their orientation to God.

A projection of the soul?

In 1845 the German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach, began his critique on “The Nature of Religion” by saying that God is the imaginative satisfaction of the

human desire for happiness. Religion is an illusion, a projection of human wishes and longings onto something outside themselves. People want to see their deepest wishes and desires embodied in another person. So they discover God. Ever since Feuerbach, this critique of religion has been repeated in a variety of forms.

From a Biblical point of view we can counter this by saying: Yes, human beings are motivated by their desire for happiness, they are filled with many wishes and longings – but this is because God created them this way. God does not allow this urge in people to evaporate into space, but answers it with his presence, his guidance and support. Human hopes are not an illusion; they are met and answered by the reality that is God.

Footprints

- *What longings do I see in the people around me?*
- *In which parts of my own life do I look for and hope for more?*
- *Where and how do I expect God to answer my questions and longings, and those of others?*

11. Encountering Our Creator

God the Creator

The Bible begins with the account of creation (Gen 1): “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth”. In every age people have encountered God in a special way in creation. This is more true of the people in ancient cultures than it is of us today, because they were fascinated by the forces of nature, while at the same time being dependent on them and threatened by them.

We worship God in a special way through praising the Creator, as, for example, in Psalm 104:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul.
O Lord my God, you are very great.
You are clothed with honour and majesty,
Wrapped in light as with a garment.
You stretch out the heavens like a tent ...
You set the earth on its foundations,
So that it shall never be shaken.
You cover it with the deep as with a garment;
The waters stood above the mountains ...: (Ps 104, 1-2.5-6)

The Psalm goes on to extol the whole process of creation. People need only look at the wonders of creation in order to discover the footprints of divine creativity. They can feel touched by God, their Creator, through the world and nature surrounding them. The greatness and beauty of nature mirror the greatness and glory of its Creator.

Since human beings are a part of creation, they can discover God’s nearness in themselves and others. Their intelligence and creativity are the work of the Creator. Their ability to cultivate nature, and to bring about science and technology, are ultimately a gift from God.

Psalm 8 highlights the fact that some of God’s glory is transferred to human beings:

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honour.” (Ps 8, 5-6)

Differentiating between Creator and creature

However, this does not mean that God becomes part of nature. He is not just a divine principle, or a divine force in nature (Pantheism), as philosophical schools have maintained in the course of history, and as esoteric movements proclaim today. The God of the Bible has to be understood as the Lord and Creator of nature, as someone outside of creation who gave rise to this creation.

The Creator upholds our lives

Yet just because the world is “the work of his hands” (Ps 8,7), God is close to us through this work. He continues to hold his creation in his hands. We owe everything to God’s care and his generously giving hand. Psalm 104 formulates this conviction:

“These all look to you
to give them their food in due season;
when you give to them, they gather it up;
when you open your hand, they are filled with good things.
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;
When you take away their breath, they die
And return to the dust.
When you send forth your spirit, they are created;
And you renew the face of the ground.” (Ps 104,27-30)

Footprints

- *Psalms 8, 19, 33 and 104 praise the Creator: Human beings discover God’s footprints in creation.*
- *What things in nature touch me particularly?*
- *What do I find so fascinating in nature that I am involuntarily reminded of God?*

12. Allowing God to Lead Us

The God of life and of history

The fundamental experiences of the People of Israel with God took place at the Exodus – leaving Egypt, passing through the Red Sea and the Covenant on Mount Sinai. Still today the Jews celebrate this event of their liberation at the Passover feast. The People of Israel believed that they had been chosen in a wonderful way, and trusted in God’s guidance. Even when they had to suffer being exiled to Babylon, their faith in the one God, Yahweh, was deepened. The Prophets repeatedly called the people back to the way of faith. Defeats and times of need were interpreted by the people as the consequence of their lack of faith and trust.

The fundamental conviction that God leads us, and follows a plan of salvation with individuals and the people as a whole, also shows in the history of the Patriarchs, especially in Abraham. God called him to leave his people and his homeland, and to travel to the Promised Land. Step by step God revealed his promises to him – a land and posterity. The way God led the fathers and mothers of the faith is so exemplary that he repeatedly introduced himself and made himself known as the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”.

God has a plan

What God has done for the People of Israel, he wants to do for all people and nations.

“In days to come
the mountain of the Lord’s house
shall be established as the highest of the mountains
and shall be raised above the hills;
all nations shall stream to it.” (Is 2,2)

This insight is repeated time and again in the Old Testament, and becomes evident in the New Testament, in Jesus Christ.

However, God also has the individual human being in view and leads each one of us personally. So we may believe that God values us and looks on us with love, as Psalm 139 tells us:

“Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written all the days that were formed for me,
When none of them as yet existed.” (Ps 139,16)

The living God goes with us

So the God of the Bible is not a God who simply created the world at the beginning of time, setting the laws of nature in motion, and who then left his creation to its own devices. In contrast to this theory of deism, our God is a God who goes with us; he is a God who cares for us.

“My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel will never slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.” (Ps 121,2-8)

Footprints

- *When answering surveys, many people say that they believe in God. Yet only a few think that he really influences their lives. How do I imagine his guidance of groups and peoples?*
- *When in my life have I experienced that God was leading me and accompanying me?*

13. God – Utterly “the Other”

The wish to see God

Which believer has not felt the longing to meet God just once, so that all doubts could be set aside? Moses is one of the towering figures of the Bible who wanted to see God. Moses had spoken with God on Mount Sinai, while the people at the foot of the mountain apostatized and built a golden calf, bowing down before it. Then Moses again met God and prayed:

“Show me your glory, I pray.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, “The Lord”; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.’ And the Lord continued, ‘See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.’”
(Ex 33,18-23)

Moses could only catch a glimpse of the “back”, that is, a footprint, as God was passing by. Precisely because he was on such a friendly footing with God, it becomes all the clearer that even Moses, that most important man, could not grasp the essence of God. Just as people are unable to bear looking at the full radiance of the sun, because it would blind them, so we are unable to see God. God accompanies us; he is close to us. He grants us his grace and his mercy. Yet he does not allow himself to be ordered about. The distance between God and ourselves remains infinite. We cannot look into his face as people look at each other, as they meet and recognize each other.

Our “in-human” God

This account from the life of Moses makes it clear that we cannot understand or hold onto God, either with our eyes or our minds. It is easier for us to say what he is not, than it is to say what he is. In this sense he is “in-human”, completely different from the way we imagine him to be. He alone is immortal, and he dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6,16).

So human beings are ultimately left with adoring this great God with profound reverence, as we do at the end of the Our Father: “For yours is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever.”

The tension of faith

In the history of human faith, just as in the tradition of the Old and New Testaments, there is a tension between imagining a God who is close to us and who accompanies us, and realizing that he is completely “the Other”, so that we are ultimately unable to know anything about him. He simply breaks through all our human imaginings and categories.

Both elements are inextricably united in our Christian faith, despite the tension that exists between them. If we only see God as close to us, the danger is great that we will try to manipulate him. If we only see him as completely “the Other”, the possibility is great that we will only believe theoretically in God, because this distant and completely “other” God has nothing to do with our lives.

In *looking for God’s footprints* we take both points of view seriously. What we human beings get to know about God can only be a footprint, his “back”. Yet the starting point for believers is that it is quite possible to find such footprints in their lives.

Footprints

- *Have I ever wished to be given the certainty that God exists? What would convince me that this God really does exist?*

- *Do I personally see God as close to me, as someone who accompanies me in my life, or is God completely “the Other”, who is quite different from what we might imagine him to be?*

14. God Hidden in Darkness

God who is both close and distant

The Bible does not just depict God as close to us and caring for us. It also speaks of a God who is incomprehensible, who allows his people to sink into need and misery. The Old Testament presents us with lamentations and complaining psalms, which describe the desperate straits of individuals or the whole people.

The Babylonian captivity was a profound experience of suffering for the people: “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept as we remembered Zion” (Ps 137,1). God is often incomprehensible in the way he leads us. Nevertheless, believers never give up believing and hoping in him. Thus we read in the Book of Habakkuk:

“Though the fig tree does not blossom,
and no fruit is on the vines;
though the produce of the olive fails
and the fields yield no food;
though the flock is cut off from the fold
and there is no herd in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord;
I will exult in the God of my salvation.
God, the Lord, is my strength.” (Hab 3,17-19)

The experience of God’s distance

This experience of God’s seeming distance also marked the life of Jesus in the New Testament. On the cross Jesus quoted from Psalm 22,1:

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?”

At this moment the darkness of being abandoned by God broke in on the one who, as Son, is most closely and uniquely united to God. Jesus spoke those words into the “darkness” that covered the land from the sixth to the ninth hour (Mt 27,45). This darkness mirrored what was going on within Jesus – total darkness that covered the whole land and cast everything under its spell. It was as though the cosmos was holding its breath (U. Luz). Yet those who know the Psalm through praying it, also know that it concludes with an expression of profound trust in God and belief in his help. “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit” (Lk 23,46; cf. Ps 31,6).

The darkness of faith

The experience that God is not just close to us, but also distant from us, is common to all who set out to follow Jesus. Spiritual dryness, emptiness, darkness can govern us inwardly, even when we try our best to believe.

God's footprints can be blotted out, he can become incomprehensible. Searching for his footprints can seem to be in vain for a time, we can be filled with uncertainty. Just as in the story about the "Footprints in the Sand", our hearts can be torn by doubts as to whether God will really help us when we need him most. We may ask: Is he even there? Faith always includes both darkness and daring (J. Kentenich).

Footprints

- *Where have I experienced darkness and loneliness in my life?*
- *What happens to my faith and my trust in God in such times of darkness?*
- *When I pray Psalm 22 I can imagine Jesus' situation on the Cross – his loneliness and darkness, but also his trust in God, his Father.*

15. Jesus Christ – God becomes Man

God comes down

We find that throughout the history of peoples and cultures, people have been building temples and places of worship that express their longing for God to be close to them. Thus the Ziggurats, the stepped temple towers of Mesopotamia, built almost 5000 years ago, were ancient signs of this longing. People built tall buildings reaching up to heaven so that their gods would find it easier to come down to them and set up their thrones there. Such is the theology of these buildings. One of these Ziggurats was the Tower of Babel. Another, which has been reconstructed, can be visited today in Ur of the Chaldeans, the Biblical home of Abraham, in present-day Iraq. The reason why the Chosen People built the Temple in Jerusalem was their wish to have God close to them.

According to New Testament understanding, God does not need such buildings in order to come to us. Since he wanted to be close to us, his Son became a human being: “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law” (Gal 4,4). In John 3,13 we find a theological reflection on this fact: “No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.” This “Son of Man”, Jesus of Nazareth, followed the path of all human beings through life even to his death, in order to be close to us.

He sanctifies the world

He who was present at the creation of the world (cf Jn 17,24; 1 Pet 1,20) appeared in a human body in the world: “And the word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1,14). A human mother, Mary of Nazareth, helped him to enter into life. Parents educated him, they taught him how to live and believe. He grew up and became a man. He worked as a carpenter. He taught and healed. He died on the cross. He lived a human life, he became one of us. His life was that of a human being (cf Phil 2,7).

Since God’s Son lived and suffered in a genuinely human way, the world has been sanctified and has been given a new dignity. Conception, the family, friendship and living together in a community, work, joy, suffering, dying and death, time and space, have become God’s footprints in a new way.

“Who sees me, sees the Father”

With and in Jesus, God is given a face; he becomes a God we can touch. We can now imagine what God is like. Jesus proclaimed grace and salvation, he went towards people, he healed them, he forgave their sins, he called God his Father.

He confessed: “The Father is in me and I am in the Father” (Jn 10,38). “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me” (Jn 12,45). When we hear Jesus’ words and see his deeds, we can picture God, we can touch him, as it were. Jesus Christ is **the** most perfect footprint, image or icon of God.

Footprints

- *What do I make of the statement that through God’s incarnation in Jesus Christ the world in all its manifestations has been sanctified?*
- *I could read and meditate on the hymn to Christ in Phil 2,6-11.*
- *What strikes me when I visit ancient religious sites and temples?*

16. Ready to Receive God: Mary

The Annunciation

It is a dramatic situation. Mary, a virgin in Nazareth, is visited by God's messenger, who tells her she is to bear a son. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1,32-33). An incredible process: God becomes Man, and this young woman is meant to be his mother.

St Luke's account of Jesus' childhood proclaimed God's incarnation, but at the same time it also describes the spiritual process by which God comes to dwell in a human heart. Mary, a human being, was inwardly ready to accept God's Word. Yet her encounter with the angel raised fundamental questions. Mary made use of her freedom before God and asked those questions. Once the angel had offered an explanation, Mary spoke those words that wrote spiritual history: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (vs 38). Mary was not merely ready to receive God's Word, she also conceived this Word of the eternal Father. The Word quite literally took flesh in her (cf Jn 1,14).

What St Paul expressed in Gal 2,20 almost in the form of an oath: "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me", became not just a spiritual process in Mary, but a physical reality. Her body became a shrine in which God's Son dwelt.

A life of looking for God's footprints

In the Biblical texts we discover Mary's abilities that clearly qualified her in a very special way for her task to be "Mother of God":

- Mary allowed events and experiences to happen, even when they were as unusual as the visit of an angel with a message. She was open and prepared to allow things to happen, even when she could not understand them, indeed, even if they were difficult to bear, or caused suffering. After she had presented Jesus in the Temple, the ancient Simeon spoke those prophetic words: "A sword will pierce your own soul too" (Lk 2,35).
- She reflected on the deeper meaning of what she had experienced. She considered what the angel's greeting could mean. She questioned how the incomprehensible incarnation of God's Son through a pregnancy without the action of man could take place. Later we are told: "Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart" (Lk 2,19). She followed them up to discover what God wanted of her.
- Much that happened with her Son remains veiled. Yet the faithful "servant of the Lord" followed the path of her Son faithfully – even under the cross.

- She even suffered it through with him, although it must have seemed that his life had been a failure.
- Her openness towards God, and her readiness to become aware of God's footprints in her life, and hence to accept his will for her, makes her the prototype, the example and Mother of all the Faithful. She is the most important searcher for God's footprints in the midst of life. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born a subject to the law ..." (Gal 4,4).

Footprints

- *Which of Mary's qualities do I consider the most important for faith?*
- *How can I become more like Mary, who lived her faith in a very special way, so that I may capture some spark of her faith?*
- *Is there a tradition in our family, parish or community, of entrusting ourselves in a special way to Mary?*

Orientation
- Theological Reflection

17. Our Way of Looking at the World

Christians of the future

One of the most quoted statements made by Karl Rahner, the great theologian of the 20th century, is: “The true believer of tomorrow will either be a mystic, one who experiences God, or he will not exist at all.” When he made that statement Rahner was not thinking of “professionals” in the spiritual world, or people who have had extraordinary experiences, such as visions or auditions. He was thinking of people like you and me who meet up with our mysterious God in the experiences of their everyday lives, and who experience or sense his presence and closeness to them.

This describes what religion is aiming at. The Latin word “religere” means “to tie back, to attach”. In their lives human beings are meant to be “attached” to the foundation of all life – God. However, if this bonding with God is to be strong and genuine, it may not be just theoretical and out of touch with life. It must be something people can practice and live in the events of their lives.

The word “mystic” comes from the Greek word “mystikos” and means “being initiated into the mystery”, “mysterious”. A mysticism of everyday life aims at our being consciously in contact with our mysterious God; it means looking at life, interpreting and living it, from the perspective of this connection.

The word mysticism indicates how this can happen. The Greek verb “myein”, which is connected with the concept “mysticism”, implies “closing eyes and lips”. We can only discover God’s mystery in the world and in our own lives, if we see and take in the world with open eyes and ears, but then close our eyes and in silence try to discover God’s footprints in what we have experienced.

Looking at the world

So, like Joseph Kentenich, we can call practical faith in Divine Providence, that is, searching for God, interpreting life in the light of faith and answering God’s call, the Christian way of looking at the world. Christians do not look just at the surface of the world and events, evaluating them according to their use and effect. They look more deeply, in order to plumb their experiences and discover what God is saying to them and others through what has happened.

We could compare this process with using a pair of night vision glasses. These glasses use the last remnants of light in order to make it possible for someone to see things in otherwise dark surroundings. Similarly, in faith people can still discover that God is close to them and guiding them when others can only see and accept the surface of life. A fateful question for all Christians is whether they can acquire and maintain this ability (J. Kentenich).

Footprints

- *Where have I experienced that an attempt is being made in my parish or Christian community to interpret life in the light of faith?*

- *If I set up a scale of 1-5, what do I feel would be the most important tasks facing the Church at present?
Which position on that scale would I give to my experience of looking for God's footprints in my life?*

- *What makes me feel that my own life has been "re-attached" to God?*

18. Discover the Mystery of God in Life

Biblical concepts denoting God's presence

Word of God, shrine of the divinity,
Lead us into your mystery.

Burning bush that is not consumed,
Tell us the name that no one knows.

Pillar of cloud and pillar of fire,
Go before us into the darkness of our times.

Key of David that opens and closes,
Show us the wellspring that never fails.

Logos, Word and answer together,
Open to us the kingdom of heaven.

In this contemporary hymn Jesus Christ is asked to reveal God's mystery to us. He himself is a mystery, because he is the Son of God. This mystery can only be expressed in pictures and symbols. They are an attempt to give expression to what is ultimately inexpressible:

- *the burning bush* from which God spoke to Moses on Horeb: "I am who I am – / *am there for you*" (Ex 3,14);
- *the pillar of cloud* that led the people of Israel out of the slavery of Egypt and indicated God's presence before the tent of meeting (Ex 13,21; 14,24; 33,9f);
- *the key of David*, that made it possible to approach the king (Is 22,22);
- *the Logos* (Greek for Word) who as the Word of the Father became man. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (Jn 1,14).

In all these and many other images and symbols the Scriptures tell us that human beings will never be able to understand and hold onto the mystery of God. On the other hand, they also indicate that God can nevertheless be experienced in what he does in us and for us.

The Scriptures speak of "God's footprint"

In order to show that God is at work, and how he works in our human reality, the Scriptures speak of God's "footprint":

- Psalm 85,13: Righteousness will go before him, and will make a path for his steps.

- Psalm 65,12: You crown the year with your bounty, abundance flows wherever you pass. (Jerusalem Bible)
- 1 Pt 2,21: For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

Our great God and our little lives

Often, when they are talking about God's actions in the world, people express the reservation: "God would be kept very busy if he had to worry about all the little details of our lives." What are "little details", and what are the things in our lives that are so important that God has to concern himself with them? To answer this question, let us use another image:

A couple were walking along the shores of a lake. The sun was shining on the calm waters of the lake. The two remarked happily that the sunrays were deflected by the water directly to them. The woman walked about fifty meters further and called out to her husband, "Also here they are shining directly on me!"

If the sun, one of the things created by God, is able to shine on billions of people at the same time, and warm them, while at the same time giving life to a whole planet, how much greater must its Creator be?

Footprints

- *What images do I know that tell of God's closeness and the way he accompanies us?*
- *Reading the Bible texts quoted above in their context could tell us more about the Bible's use of images.*

19. Only His Footprints

We can't determine God's will

We can only try to conclude the importance and meaning of events by *looking for God's footprints*. It is often difficult to discover, or even guess at, God's will in what we experience in life, and in the way he guides us. This is particularly true of painful experiences when we often fail to see the deeper meaning. At such times we feel how true those words of the Prophet Isaiah are:

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.” (Is 55,8-9)

Struggling to find the right way

Often we have to struggle inwardly to discover the right way to go. This struggle can be compared with the fight of the Patriarch Jacob through the night (Gen 32,25-33):

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he struck him on the hip socket; and Jacob's hip was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.'

The Judeo-Christian tradition has always understood this battle as taking place between Jacob and God. His perseverance despite being wounded in the hip, and his request for a blessing, are interpreted as the way he struggled with God in prayer although he could not understand God, and despite disappointments and lack of success, and the experience that God had not heard his plea even though it was so urgent.

So *looking for God's footprints* has also to be understood as a struggle, a constant attempt to see all our experiences in life as a call from God. With deep trust we may take it that God holds our life firmly and lovingly in his hands. Nevertheless, we are not given a direct insight into where God is leading us. Our life is and remains a constant search and questioning.

“Secular” and “sacred”

Since people find it so difficult to feel God's closeness in everyday events, they often experience a deep gulf between their “secular” lives in the world and their experiences

in the “sacred” sphere of the Church and religion. They spontaneously see their experiences with God as belonging exclusively to “holy” places and that part of their lives.

Looking for God’s footprints in the world builds a bridge between the “secular” and the “sacred”. The God whom we encounter in Church services and liturgy also leads us outside the ambit of the church buildings He is close to us also in our everyday lives and work in the midst of the world.

Footprints

- *In which experiences have I felt particularly that it is not so easy to discover God’s will for my life?*
- *When was the last time that I begged God with special intensity for help? What did I experience?*
- *When did I experience that I was helped in my everyday life by what was said and celebrated during a church service?*

20. Guessing God's Presence in the Inconspicuous Events of Everyday Life

An experience

“Still depressed by an unsuccessful team meeting, I walked to work. The footprints of God's love seemed to be very far away. I arrived at the office to find a most beautiful dawn lighting up the sky. I interpreted this as a silent sign of God's warmth. Then, as the day went on a colleague said some nice things to me. Time for a professional discussion although this had not been planned. A group I had never considered before asked me for support. In the evening an appointment was confirmed, although it had already been cancelled. Let me remain in your love.”

This was one man's *search for God's footprints* at the end of a working day. He went over what had happened during the day and described not just outward happenings, but also the feelings they generated in him. An unsuccessful team meeting depressed him – he felt inwardly that God's love was far from him. Yet he also had positive experiences. A sign in nature – the dawn – became a positive sign of God's warmth and love. In the end we find his gratitude, and the request to be allowed to remain in God's love.

We can feel that this man was aware that God accompanied him. It is possible that someone else in his team at work experienced things quite differently. Yet the writer was simultaneously

- wholly involved with his work,
- wholly involved with himself and his inner experiences,
- wholly convinced that God was accompanying him.

His faith in God included his everyday life. He interpreted not just the big and unique experiences of his life (choice of profession, marriage, birth of a child, other important or upsetting experiences) as God's footprints in his life. It was precisely the little and unspectacular happenings of everyday life that became a means by which he remained in contact with God.

Love is nourished by attentiveness

Our relationship to God is like any deep and loving relationship to another human being. It is nourished when the many little things of everyday life remind us of the person we love. Even physical separation cannot cut this inner union. Many little happenings will jog our memory. No one finds it strange if a woman is reminded of her husband and his love when she sees a beautiful flower. No one finds it odd if a man carries a picture of his wife in his wallet.

Love between people is an image and likeness of our love for God. Our love for God will also grow if we invest our thoughts, emotions, and time in him, and when we converse with him. In the same way as other attitudes, love for God is generated in us when we practice being constantly attentive to him.

The “little prophets” in our lives

When he spoke about “looking for God in all things”, Ignatius Loyola was describing what is meant here. Joseph Kentenich called creation, human beings and events ‘little prophets’ that indicate God’s presence and closeness in our lives. We are invited to take up their message and decipher it.

We may take it that – without violating human freedom – nothing can escape from God’s hand, nor can any process in the cosmos. Everything has a place in God’s Providence. This also applies when we are unable to interpret much that happens, or even if we are unable to understand things till the end of our days.

Footprints

- *How do I feel about the idea that God accompanies me and talks to me through the many little things that happen in everyday life?*
- *Which qualities in human love can I also recognize in my love for God?*
- *Which “little prophets” are important to me?*

21. The Simplicity of Faith

Naïve or just a subjective experience?

At an evening meditation during a shared holiday some families were telling one another about their experiences that day. A woman thanked for the sunshine and the glorious outing they had had. A man thanked for the good discussions he had enjoyed on the way. A child mentioned a flowering meadow and an adventure playground. “For all these things we thank you, almighty God!” With these words the time of prayer together came to an end.

We are told each day in the weather report how good weather comes about. Psychologists can explain why conversations are satisfying. A biologist can explain in detail why flowers grow so plentifully, if we don’t know this from personal experience in our gardens at home.

What has God to do with it all? Or, how can you reconcile these everyday experiences, seen in faith, with a training in the natural sciences, or the knowledge of cause and effect in nature and human society? Isn’t it very naïve and subjective to thank God for them?

Deciding to believe

At present human knowledge is doubling every five years. Since, as a result, fewer and fewer people are able to have comprehensive knowledge of the “progress” in the world and in technology – is any one person able to do so? – the danger is great that individuals will withdraw into their own private niche. There they will feel sheltered and safe despite the incomprehensibility of the world. They will look for new fields of experience in order to feel that they are still alive. They will consult esoteric oracles and horoscopes in order to find an interpretation of their lives. There are not a few “enlightened” contemporaries who consider faith in God, and living one’s faith in everyday life, synonymous with superstition.

Nevertheless, Christians believe in God’s creative power. All that has come into existence, and that constantly comes into being, ultimately comes from him. Science and technology are based on the fundamental principles of his good creation. So deciphering the human genome is nothing else than spelling out what he has placed into creation. The intellect and the overwhelming abilities of human beings, who are able to achieve and bring about such great things, are gifts from the Creator. God is the One who is always infinitely greater, and he embraces all that is.

New childlikeness

For the enlightened people of today, it is an exercise in humility to admit that they are unable to make themselves, despite all the progress that has been made. They are

equally unable to give a meaning to and secure human development, or set a meaningful goal for it. Above all they experience that knowledge can be used to promote, or destroy, life.

So believers have to bear with the tension created by admiring human achievements and sharing in them, and at the same time being dependent on the Creator of all things and their own lives. Love motivates them to praise and thank God for what they receive each day. Unless people become like children in the sense of the Gospel (cf. Mt 18,2f), they will never understand and be able to live with this tension. Only a new form of childlikeness (J. Kentenich) enables human greatness to co-exist with being a child before God.

Footprints

- *How do I experience the connection between the natural sciences and technology, on the one hand, and faith in God, on the other?*
- *How can I personally thank God in an authentic way for the smaller and great things in my life?*

22. Footprints in the Bible and in the Sacraments

God has many and varied footprints

Christians cannot see the signs of God's closeness, and the way they experience how he accompanies them in everyday life, in isolation. They are complemented, upheld, interpreted and corrected by other signs of God's presence. So,

- besides the **things and events** we encounter,
- and our **inner experiences**,
- there are the footprints of God in the **Bible**,
- and in the **celebration of the sacraments**, in particular the celebration of the Eucharist.

The connection between these four elements can be compared with a network of pipes. Such a network of pipes is open at the top and connected at the bottom. If water is poured into one of the pipes, the level will rise in all the other pipes. If one of the pipes is blocked, it affects all the other pipes.

It is much the same in the spiritual life when we look for God's footprints. The four elements are interconnected:

- *Looking for God's footprints in things and events* ensures that our faith is not out of touch with life.
- *Looking for God's footprints within ourselves* guarantees that our faith will not get stuck with outward practices, but will take hold of us inwardly.
- Looking for God's guidance and will in the **Bible** connects our personal experiences with the original experiences of Christians and the People of Israel. The Biblical texts point out the way to us, so that we can order and interpret our personal experiences correctly.
- The **celebration of the sacraments**, and in particular the celebration of the **Eucharist**, sharpens our sensitivity, our "intuition" (J. Kentenich), for the authentic activity of God. The Church, as the communion of believers, guarantees that in these signs God is very close to us in Jesus Christ. In the signs of bread and wine our many and varied experiences are taken into the great act of consecration.

Allowing our personal experiences to be questioned

It is clear, then, that we are not left alone with our experiences, or with *looking for God's footprints*, in everyday life.

For example, I am faced with a problem in my marriage or at work. I examine my experiences to help me to come to a correct decision. These could be my own wishes

and aspirations, my abilities, the wishes and abilities of my marriage partner, or conditions at work. Behind this search is always the question: What does God want from me? Which way does he want me to go?

I may expect further help from the Bible and the celebration of the sacraments:

- Which Bible text speaks to me in a special way in this situation? Which passages in the Bible seem to indicate the way I should go?
- I may consciously take my concerns into the celebration of the Eucharist. I can include these concerns when, for example, the words of the offertory are spoken: "Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made, it will become for us the bread of life."

Footprints

- *Which of the four elements of the spiritual life and looking for God's footprints appeals to me most?*
- *Which of the elements do I find difficult to practice?*
- *With which of the elements do I want to work in particular in the time to come?*

23. God's Footprints Challenge us to Act

Looking for God's footprints awakens initiative

Looking for God's footprints in the world challenges us to answer God's initiative. It also awakens our initiative.

Examples in the Bible

Creation

One of the most intense experiences of God's activity is creation. The first Biblical account of creation (Gen 1,1-2,4a) comes to a head in the creation of humankind. God entrusted the rest of creation to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." He also gave them all the plants. The gift of creation is at the same time a task.

Abraham

God repeatedly enters into a covenant with human beings. The covenant with Abraham is fundamental to the People of Israel, indeed to all three monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Abraham's first encounter with his God was both a promise and a commission: God wanted to give Abraham a new home; for his part Abraham had to leave his kindred and his father's house and go out to this new land. "You will be a blessing" (Gen 12,1ff).

The Covenant of Sinai

One of the most important experiences of the People of Israel was the covenant they made with God on Sinai. After God had led his people out of their slavery in Egypt, God promised to be faithful to his covenant with them. At the same time he gave them the Ten Commandments and the Law according to which they had to live, as a sign of their faithfulness to the covenant (Gen 20,1-21).

Mary

An outstanding scene is the annunciation of the birth of Jesus. The young woman, Mary, received the promise of the Messiah, questioned, and declared her readiness to become the chosen bearer of God's promise. Accepting God's plans is the most active form of *looking for God's footprints*.

The Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5,1-7.29) summarizes the way Jesus envisaged God's kingdom. Also here many promises were made, particularly at the beginning in the Beatitudes. Jesus gave directives about matters of faith and the way people live together. For example, he told his disciples, "You are the light of the world". He commented on this statement, saying, "A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house." He went on to challenge his disciples, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt 5, 14-16).

God's care for us needs an answer

These examples show that God comes towards us with great love, he is close to us and goes with us, he gives us his promises. God's care for us requires an answer from us. Love seeks for love in return. God leaves us our freedom and does not force us to enter into a covenant with him. Yet the footprints God leaves in our lives call upon us to help to form the world and life, and to share responsibility for the way people live together.

Footprints

- *Which passages in the Bible show how God comes towards people and entrusts them with a task?*
- *What is so valuable to me in my relationship with God that I would like to answer it through my life?*

**God's Footprints
in the Midst of Life**

24. We Find God's Footprints Everywhere

God is hidden, yet present in everything

Alfred Delp SJ formulated the way he saw God's presence in our lives in these words:

"It is as clear and tangible to me as never before: The world is filled with God. It is as though he breathes out to us through all the pores of everything that exists. We, however, are often so blind. We get stuck with the beautiful or evil hours of our lives, and do not plumb the depths of our experiences until we reach the floor of the spring from which they flow to us from God. This applies to all that is good and beautiful, as well as to what causes suffering. God wants to celebrate an encounter with us in everything, and he asks for and wants our adoring self-surrender and answer."

If, as believers, we accept that God comes towards us and wants to meet us in everything, nothing is excluded. However, he is with us in the same way as he was with the disciples on the way to Emmaus: "Their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Lk 24,16). At that time the Lord was physically present with them, he was not hidden in people, things and events as he is now.

Psalm 139 expresses the conviction that God is omnipresent in these words:

"You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast."

(Psalm 139,5-10)

God surrounds us on all sides, not to confine us, but to warm us like a cloak that protects us when it is very cold. God wants to enable us to live, just as the oxygen in the air surrounds us, or as the water covers and refreshes us when we go for a swim in the sea.

The things, people and events around us can become an image and likeness of God's closeness to us. "God embraces us through reality" (W. Lambert). Things, people and

events remain what they are. A flower is first of all a plant, and has a definite task in the ecological network of the world around. Yet it can also take on a symbolical meaning when, for example, it is packed as a present. It then becomes a sign of love. In the same way, all things, people and events can take on a symbolic meaning to indicate God's closeness to us: as a created thing, a flower "proclaims" its Creator; as a "little prophet" it proclaims his presence.

Footprints

- *Taking Alfred Delp's text as a basis, I reflect on how God comes to meet me in the actual world around me.*
- *What things or processes play an important role in my life? How can I discover God's presence in them?*

25. God's Footprint: My Life

My personal history with God

Psalm 139 extols more than God's omnipresence. It also praises God as the One who embraces my personal biography as the Lord of History:

“For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.
In your book were written
all the days that were formed for me,
when none of them as yet existed.” (Psalm 139,13-16)

Just as God was with me at the start of my life, so he remains with me all the days of my life, and he will be there when I come to die.

When St Paul was speaking about Jesus Christ to the people of Athens at the Areopagus, he expressed his conviction in these words: “That they (people) would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him – though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’”(Acts 17,27f).

It means that the history of my life is not a list of chance happenings and trifles, but is made up of significant stages in a life that is lived under God's loving gaze. Of course, I cannot always understand God's plans for me, in fact I may rarely do so. However, his affirmation applies to every situation, none is excluded.

Listening to the voice of my soul

Each day I encounter thousands of impressions. During a trip in the car or a walk through the streets I am flooded with information and pictures. It is quite impossible for me to digest all these impressions. So my psyche protects itself by choosing a few that it allows to take centre stage in my awareness. Some impressions can be particularly strong. That is why I can say about a special experience: I am impressed!

- Why does an experience impress me particularly?
- What effect does this experience have deep within me?
- What does this happening remind me of?
- What does it re-ignite in me?

- Does it awaken joy and a feeling of happiness?
- Or does it open old wounds that hurt?

It is as though I have stored my whole past in myself. I look at every new experience in connection with this treasure of experiences. If I accept that God accompanies me on all my ways, and that I always live and move in him, then each and every experience has a meaningful place along my path through life. I can trust that God will make use of even the most difficult and painful situations in my life to steer me towards my goal.

I could imagine this in a picture: We human beings sit at the oars of the boat of our lives. We can influence the direction of the boat to a very large extent. However, God, who keeps the success of our lives in view, is at the helm. Through the general way he guides us through life, he gives us practical help and encouragement (“grace”) to do something specific in the situations in which we find ourselves.

Footprints

- *What events in my life have been particularly important?*
- *With the help of the questions mentioned above let me look more closely at something that happened in the last few days.*

26. God's Footprint: Your Life

What applies to me, applies to you as well

When we are so careful to show respect for our own lives out of reverence for the way God has accompanied us, it follows that what applies to me, also applies to you. Your path through life reveals the unique and original way in which God has led you, just as mine does.

So, for example, when I look at the hundreds of lit windows in a high-rise building at night, I can ponder on the fact that behind each of those windows there are people who love their lives as much as I do, who experience joy and suffering, who are looking for a meaning to their lives, and who do all they can to capture some joy in life – just as I do. All of them live beneath God's loving gaze and are guided by him.

Or, when I am out shopping, I pass so many people. Their faces flash by in a second. I forget most of them immediately. Yet, the experiences of life have chiselled lines in those faces. Each feature can tell its own history of joy and suffering, of success or failure. God has always looked at each of those faces; he was present at each event that has left its mark on their features.

"... you did it to me"

In St Matthew's Gospel (25,31-44), Jesus talks about the Last Judgement and admonishes the people to feed the hungry, give clothes and help to the poor, and visit the sick and those in prison. He closes his sermon with the words, "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me". What he was aiming at is not simply that we should do good, but more importantly that we should discover the dignity of others. This dignity is to be found in the fact that even the least among us is a brother or sister of Jesus.

No one can take from us the dignity of being created by God, or being a brother or sister of Jesus. This means that in our dealings with others we have to acknowledge their dignity and value.

Attentiveness to your way

If I have to be attentive to the people who live behind distant windows, or the strangers who pass by in the streets, how much more this applies to those whose path through life is closely united with mine.

There is my marriage partner with whom I share a path through life. There are our children who accompany us on this path for a time, and then set out on their own way through life. There are our ageing parents who are coming to the end of their lives, and who are taking leave of what they have loved in life. In each case we have to try to

empathize with them and discover God's design for their lives, so that we can help them to decipher it. If we are attentive to what they say, we will be able to hear what experiences God is giving them.

Since God looks at all life with love, this life is worth protecting in every stage and phase – the unborn child, the sick or disabled, the elderly.

Footprints

- *When did I last have a more personal discussion with someone about their experiences and way through life?*
- *Which people are closest to me? From my perspective, what signs do I see that could reveal God's design for their lives? How can I help them to enter into God's plans?*

27. God's Footprint: The Voices of the Times

The voices of the times

Biblical faith takes as its starting point that God's plan of salvation embraces the whole of the world and human history. Nothing that happens under the sun is excluded from this plan. If something were to happen without God's knowledge and agreement, it would mean that there is a power outside God that can work independently of God. God would no longer be God, the First Cause of all that is.

The first letter to the Corinthians (15,28) speaks of the goal of world and human history: God rules over everything and in everything. We experience day after day that this goal has not yet been reached. However, whatever happens is orientated to this goal.

We are invited to see, observe and decipher the signs of the times, that is, situations, events, trends and developments in the world at large,

... as signs of salvation

Believers connect the events of their times with God. They discover God's call or challenge in them. They are convinced that "the voice of the times is the voice of God" (Cardinal Faulhaber).

For example, what does the threat of war mean to individual countries and the whole of humankind? How should we, as Christians, react to an individual's claim to power? How do natural disasters challenge a general feeling of solidarity among peoples? What do such experiences mean for the peaceful co-existence of peoples – beneath God's gaze?

God wants us to co-operate with him

The way God calls to us through the signs of the times does not force us to act. God is waiting for our free and willing response to them. God leaves us our freedom, so we are free to become involved in initiatives to help others, or not, and we are free in how we do so.

St Augustine formulated it this way: "God created the world without human co-operation, but he does not want to redeem it without that co-operation." God wants to save and redeem us from evil and from what makes us unhappy, as we pray in the Our Father, but he requires our co-operation.

We need great sensitivity and empathy

We will not be able to experience and interpret every event equally, and with the same intensity, as God's voice. Not everything in our society that shouts for our attention is a

call from God. We need to listen very carefully to get behind the noise, and look very keenly in order to see through what is happening. We need to be sensitive, in order to be able to distinguish between the negative tendencies of the times and the positive spirit of the times.

This needs to be practiced, and we need to search constantly. We need to pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, meditate on the Scriptures, and attempt and struggle to answer God's call correctly in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Footprints

- *Which developments or events in our society, in our country, or in the world concern me at the moment?*
- *What could God be calling to us from them?*
- *How do I want to answer that call personally?*

28. God's Footprint: Creation

Protecting creation

Whatever we do to save creation, to protect unborn life, endangered species and plants, or to slow down climate change, is necessary, Biblically speaking, out of reverence for the Lord of this creation. It is as though God has included a bit of himself in creation, in particular human beings. He placed laws into the nature of things and people that have a meaning and purpose. No sphere of life, and no event, can fall out of the Creator's hand.

His commission to the first human beings "fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over ... every living thing" does not give them carte blanche to exploit and ruin the earth. Human beings are meant to create a culture out of nature, but without destroying that nature.

Protecting human beings as God's creation

The preservation of creation applies in a very special way to human beings, the "crown of creation". We have to protect human life in all its forms and at every stage of development.

This protection begins with caring wisely for our own bodies. Together with Psalm 139 I cannot praise God – "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" – and at the same time allow my body to go to rack and ruin. My body is one of God's footprints. So I should care for it, heal its illnesses, and look after it as the visible part of my personality.

According to the rule – "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Mt 7,12) – we have to offer the same respect and reverence to every other human life from the moment of its conception in its mother's womb until the moment of its natural death.

The demand that we protect human life applies in a very special way today in view of present-day gene technology. It is a legitimate part of the commission to subdue the earth when we decipher the human genome, rejoice in our improved understanding of human nature, and discover the origins of life. This only becomes self-destructive when people set themselves up as the creators of life. We will only bring about a "tower of Babel" in the microcosm.

So, in the spirit of *looking for God's footprints*, it is an ethical requirement that we respect what we find in creation. This includes the disposition and talents we have been given. When we do so, we become creative in the world at large and in our own little lives.

Self-control

This clearly presents us with the question: Are we allowed to do all that we can do? Where is the limit to the manipulation of creation; where do we have to stop and give up taking any further steps?

This is similar to a decision taken by two people before they marry. For the sake of their relationship, both have to give up other relationships. This renunciation is the foundation for their relationship. If one of the partners oversteps the boundary and begins to experiment with other relationships, he or she will destroy this foundation. In the same way, in our relationship to creation we have to practice renunciation and self-control.

Footprints

- *Where am I confronted with questions about protecting creation?*
- *How do I contribute to protecting creation in my everyday life?*
- *As far as I am concerned, where are the limits to the manipulation of life and human beings?*

29. God and Suffering

Human bitterness

The German magazine “Der Spiegel” – the Mirror – published the following death notice in its 30th issue in 1966, page 90:

“After a long period of inactivity, God the Lord departed this life. As we know, the Vietnam war continues with unchecked harshness, napalm bombs fall on the civilian population, General Ky, a Hitler supporter, continues to receive support from America, more soldiers die every day. We read that more and more people die of starvation in India, China and Algeria, wheat rots in Western grain silos, Church communities collect money to re-paint their cemetery fences. As we can see, more and more people are tortured, murdered, and raped in God’s kingdom; they are allowed to starve, or burn to death, or suffocate.

In our opinion, everyone who thinks honestly is forced to come to this conclusion: The God, who once reigned so gloriously, whom my soul praised, who led me to green pastures, is absent, ill, gone away, dead. A God, who arranged everything for the best in Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto, in Vietnam and New York Harlem, no longer exists. He has not done his job. His position is vacant. He needs a locum. The future is open.”

The litany of accusations against a God, who can allow such things to happen in our world and our lives, could be continued almost infinitely and brought up-to-date: terrorism, Aids, epidemics, natural catastrophes.

A God who saves?

Each of us can understand the bitterness of people in the face of such suffering. Nevertheless, God counters it in the words of the Bible:

“For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes ...” (Jer 29,11-14)

These are words that counter people’s experiences of helplessness, failure, need and suffering.

The hope of Christians

It is difficult, and for many people impossible, to discover God’s footprints in the catastrophes that happen in the world and people’s lives. Christians believe that God sent his Son into this hopeless situation. Jesus Christ entered into this hopelessness.

On the cross he called out in despair, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27,45). He called out to a distant God – but he believed in him. Under the cross, Mary, his Mother, honoured the Yes she had spoken at the Annunciation with its ultimate consequences.

This is the model of Christian hope in the midst of suffering – to see suffering, and to cry out in anguish if necessary, and yet to believe that God also embraces this anguish and wills the salvation of humankind. Christian faith cannot explain the incomprehensibility of anguish, catastrophes or suffering – the “cross” – in life. Yet faith counters it with the conviction that God can turn everything into a blessing for us.

Footprints

- *Which suffering oppresses me at the moment? Where do I experience suffering or despair in the world around me?*
- *How do I try to bear with and survive times of suffering?*
- *How can the faith that Jesus Christ experienced all the darkness, and even the absence of God in his death on the cross, help me in times of suffering?*

30. The Discernment of Spirits

What is God's will?

Believers are convinced that nothing that happens on earth or in the cosmos can fall out of God's all-embracing plan of salvation. Nevertheless, the evil in the world gives people no rest. When war wreaks havoc in their lives, when children are abused and women raped, when the goods of this earth are divided unjustly, it can not be in keeping with God's will and his commandments. Christians are realists. They reckon with the evil one and with sin in the world.

So looking for God's footprints requires the "discernment of spirits" (Ignatius of Loyola). We have to distinguish between a positive spirit of the times and the negative tendencies in the times (J. Kentenich).

- The negative tendencies in the times are generated by spiritual currents in society that are ultimately inimical to human beings and contemptuous of human life. When people misuse their freedom and turn against creation and other human beings, evil is at work (cf. Ro 1,29ff; Gal 5,19ff). Although God is able to write straight on these crooked lines, what we are dealing with here in the first place are abuses, or even sins, against God's will. They call for our protest, our opposition and our help towards bringing about change.
- It is important to be able to discover the positive spirit of the times. When people are encouraged to live better lives, when they contribute their talents to enhance the wellbeing of all, and love becomes the foundation for our living together (cf. the canticle of love in 1 Cor 13), we find God's footprints and his Spirit.

Listen, be silent, pray

How can I personally, how can people together, find out what is part of the positive spirit of the times, or of the negative tendencies of the times? There are no mathematical formulae we can use to calculate what is God's footprint and what is opposed to his will. With the support of the community of believers, people need to develop an inner agreement with God's will, an inner certainty about the direction to take.

This inner empathy and sensitivity can only come about through listening carefully, being silent and praying. When we weigh up something that has happened - a challenge, or something that has touched us - in the presence of God, and ask for help and insight, we may hope to be able to discover signs leading in the right direction. Of course, much will remain subjective. However, faith and living by faith are always something very personal.

Criteria for *looking for God's footprints*

The spiritual tradition of the Church mentions certain criteria to guide us. Let us mention a few:

- Whatever generates lasting inner joy in us, and does not turn out to be a shallow momentary pleasure, has something to do with God's footprints.
- When positive access to other people opens up before us, and we do not want to have our way come hell or high water, we can discover God's footprints.
- Often what costs greater effort, or even requires us to bear suffering, is more likely to be God's footprint.
- It is a good idea to submit our ideas to the judgement of other people who have more experience in the spiritual life.
- The Bible and the tradition of the Church point out the way when we are looking for God's footprints. They cannot contradict what is written in the Bible.
- When I look at an experience as a whole, do I feel inwardly convinced that God has led me?

Footprints

- *Which criteria of discernment do I spontaneously apply in certain circumstances? Which would I like to learn?*
- *Where can I apply the above criteria of discernment to an important experience I had recently?*

Invitation:

www.godsfootprints.info

Do you want to have this in the English booklet???

Looking for God's footprints is not just a spiritual way for individuals or groups. Through *looking for God's footprints* many can bear witness to others about God's presence in their lives. That is why we have set up the website www.godsfootprints.info.

The individual pages

- **Meditation:** Each week a new meditation connected with *looking for God's footprints*, with a corresponding picture, will appear on the opening page.
- **Prayers for looking for God's footprints:** A prayer will appear regularly in which we meditate on and digest our encounters with others, with things and events, in the presence of God.
- **Sharing experiences:** Here each one can share his or her experiences in connection with the God of life. The contributions are anonymous so that privacy is protected. There is a window that can be opened, and experiences can be written down and sent in.
- **Reading experiences:** Here you can read the experiences of others. Most of them are simple experiences in everyday life that either impressed or touched someone, and that they consciously connected with God. The experiences related often do not follow the sequence of *looking for God's footprints*. Yet they are authentic experiences of people who consciously look for God in everything they encounter in their everyday lives.
- **Meditation:** Here you will find the meditations of the previous weeks and months. They can be called up at any time and used as inspiration for personal prayer or group work.
- **Voices of the times:** Here you find newspaper articles, reports, etc., on the subject of *looking for God's footprints*.
- **Materials:** Here you will find tried and tested materials on the subject of *looking for God's footprints* for
 - Group work with young people
 - Group work with families
 - Church services
 - Work in parish councils

You can add your own contribution in the window and place it at the disposal of others.

Since the website is constantly being developed, you will always find new suggestions and perspectives, to which every internet user can offer a comment.

Workshop on *looking for God's footprints*

All are very welcome to share in this workshop of *looking for God's footprints*, either by

- reading the meditations and prayers, etc.,
- making comments or asking questions, and in this way helping to build up the website, or
- by placing materials you have tried out in parish or community work at the disposal of others.

Orders

for meditation leaflets can be made via the website or from
Patris Verlag, Postfach 1162, 56179 Vallendar, Germany, Fax 0049-261-671192
Email: bestellen@patris-verlag.de

Further Reading

St Augustine, Confessions

St Therese of Lisieux, Story of a Soul

Jean-Pierre de Caussade, Abandonment to Divine Providence

Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God

Brian Grogan SJ, Finding God in All Things

A. Patrick Purnell SJ, Our Faith Story – Its telling and its sharing

Jean Galot SJ, Abba Father – We long to see your face

Carlo-Maria Martini, What am I that you care for me? Praying with the Psalms