

A selection from Interior Freedom, by Jacques Philippe.

Chapter II: The Present Moment

Part I of VIII

I. FREEDOM AND THE PRESENT MOMENT

One of the essential conditions of interior freedom is the ability to live in the present moment. For one thing, it is only then that we can exercise freedom. We have no hold on the past – we can't change the smallest bit of it. People sometimes try to relive past events considered failures (“I should have done this...I should have said that...”) but those imaginary scenarios are merely dreams: it is not possible to backtrack. The only free act we can make in regard to the past is to accept it just as it was and leave it trustingly in God's hands.

We have very little hold on the future either. Despite all our foresight, plans, and promises, it takes very little to change everything completely. We can't program life in advance, but can only receive it moment by moment.

All we have is the present moment. Here is the only place where we can make free acts. Only in the present moment are we truly in contact with reality.

Someone might think it tragic that the present is so fleeting and neither the past nor the future really belongs to us. But, approached from the standpoint of Christian faith and hope, the present moment is rich in grace and holds immense reassurance.

This is where God is present. “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Matthew 28:20). God is the eternal present. Every moment, whatever it brings, is filled with God's presence, rich with the possibility of communion with God. We do not commune with God in the past or the future, but by welcoming each instant as the place where he gives himself to us. We should learn to live in each moment as sufficient to itself for God is there; and if God is there, we lack nothing. We feel we are missing this or that, simply because we are living in the past or in the future instead of dwelling in each second. Psalm 145 says, “The eyes of all look to thee, and thou givest them their food in due season. Thou openest thy hand, thou satisfiest the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145[144]: 15-16).

There is something very liberating in this understanding of the grace of the present moment. Even if the whole of our past has been a disaster, even if our future seems like a dead end, *now* we can establish communion with God through an act of faith, trust, and abandonment. God is eternally present, eternally young, eternally new, and our past and future are his. He can forgive everything, purify everything, renew everything. “He will renew you in his love” (Zephaniah 3:17). In the present moment, because of his infinitely merciful love, we always have the possibility of starting again, not impeded by the past, or tormented by the future. The past is in the hands of the Merciful God, who can draw benefit from everything: the future is in the hands of the Providence of God who will never forget us. Faith keeps us from living as many people do, oppressed by a burdensome past and worrisome future. Living in the present permits our hearts to expand.

To come:

- *“To love” has a present tense only*
- *We can suffer for only one moment*
- *Let the day’s own trouble be sufficient for the day*
- *Tomorrow can take care of itself*
- *Live, instead of waiting to live*
- *Availability to other people*
- *Psychological time and interior time*

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