

SUMMER 2015 CHECK-UP

My time in the clinic waiting room starts to wear on, so I pull out a notepad and begin to list the things that I am noticing.

The list is not impressive, but here it is.

I notice that in this year of draught, with the hot dry season arriving a month early, people are not watering their yards.

I notice that the little patch of grass in my own yard daily is fading from rich green to the color of straw. My weeping cherry tree looks listless.

I notice that I am sleeping well, that my hip hurts, that my calendar is much freer now than it was, say, two months ago.

I notice that I seem to be less judging of others, more ready to be generous. Is there a trend here? I want to think so.

The question “What am I noticing?” primes the pump of the imagination. It is a simple question, a modest starting point.

The imagination is the birthplace of the emerging self, where experience and reflection and meaning and holy possibility enter into creative conversation. Noticing things starts that conversation.

When I can name what I am actually noticing, then can I ask the question: “What am I paying attention to?”

This question is not the same as the question: “What is *demanding* my attention?” Or: “What do I *need* to pay attention to?”—questions which will exhaust you.

So, what am I paying attention to?

I am paying attention to the manuscript I am working on, hoping but uncertain that it will become a book.

I am paying attention to the ways I am becoming poor. Not financially, but interiorly, clinging to nothing, and giving away freely—both material things and some well guarded parts of myself, like presence and time and attentiveness to the unexpected encounter.

And I am paying attention to who I am becoming in my freedom to become poor.

What I most pay attention to, I discover, is the interior work, as heart and mind, soul and spirit and attitude, are challenged and invited into a larger self-in-God.

Just about everything Pope Francis says or writes challenges me to conversion, to a turning of heart toward God in humble and fearless ways.

Willingly, my life becomes, little by little, poor, like Jesus. I am letting it happen. I am not resisting.

I am not merely noticing this interior work. I am definitely paying attention.

*Questions for reflection ...*

What am I noticing these days? (*make a list; nothing is too insignificant or unrelated to “the important things”*)

What am I paying attention to? (*this list may be shorter; it will reveal what most engages you or matters most*)

*What Mary Sharon is reading in these summer days ...*

- *I and Thou*, by Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. I read this classic text (tr. 1970) back in my Existential Lit class in college, and find its insights even richer today.
- *Laudato Si'*, “Care for Our Common Home,” the recently released encyclical of Pope Francis. He brings the I-Thou relationship to every dimension of the life we share together in our common home, “sister mother Earth.” His language is direct, lyrical, encouraging, challenging, inspired. A must read!