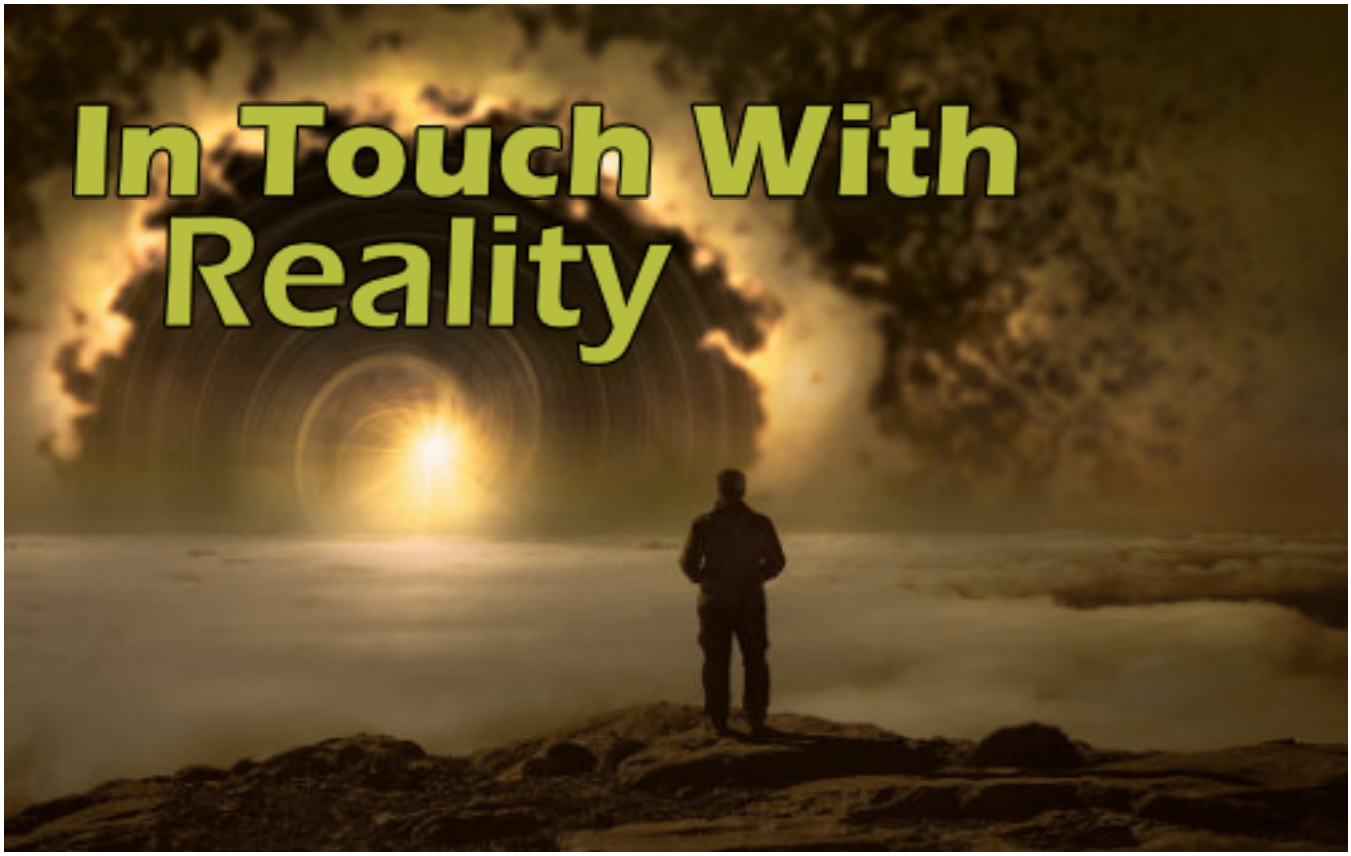
In Touch With Reality



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Are you in touch with reality? Am I in touch with reality? Of course, we like to think that we are in touch with reality, since to be out of touch with reality is a sign of insanity. But how well are we in touch with reality? When we consider our basic outlook on life, when we consider our perception of ourselves, our perception of others, our perceptions of the world and of God, do we see things as they really are or do we, perhaps, see them in a way that is incomplete or skewed or distorted or perhaps downright false? The psychologists and the psychiatrists speak to us about what they call cognitive distortions. Most of us have cognitive distortions of one sort or another. Who is it that really perceives and understands things as they really are?

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Perhaps we can gain some insight into this question by reflecting on St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. Even from a superficial reading of what St. Paul has written in this letter, it is evident that he has received a tremendous light and revelation from God—a light and revelation of cosmic proportions. God has revealed to him the mystery of His plan for the whole of creation. St. Paul tells us that this plan of God was hidden in God from all eternity, but He has now made it known to the Apostles and prophets of the New Testament. Through Christ, God has restored His friendship with mankind. One of the marks of true and genuine friends is that they share secret and intimate things about themselves with each other. So God, in His friendship with man, has shared with us the secrets of His mind and heart. St. Paul, in communicating

this revelation to us makes known that, at the very center and heart of this plan of God, is the person of Jesus Christ. God's plan from all eternity was that all things—*all things* in Heaven and on Earth, men and angels and material creation—are to be united in Christ. What St. Paul further reveals to us is that this union of all things in Christ is not just a future reality, but it is, even now, a present reality. It is a present reality not only for those who have died and are now united to God in Heaven. It is a present reality here on earth. If we have been baptized, if we share in the divine life of God by grace, then we are, right now, at this very moment, in Christ Jesus. We are united to Him in an intimate way such that we have a share in whatever He possesses. We have a share in His glory, we have a share in His wisdom, we have a share in His victory over sin and death, we have a share in His union with the Father and with all men. St. Paul goes so far as to say that not only have we died and risen with Christ, but we are, in some mysterious way, already seated with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6).

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Now at this point, some of my readers may be questioning themselves saying: this is all very wonderful and elevated doctrine, but does this teaching really harmonize with my lived experience? If I am, even now, united to Christ and if I share in His triumph and victory over sin, why do I experience such a hard struggle against sin? If I am so closely united to the risen Christ and am seated with Him in the heavenly places, why am I filled with so many anxieties and troubles and preoccupations?

Well, I think one possible way of addressing this objection would be to say that perhaps we are not altogether in touch with reality; perhaps we are not seeing things as they truly are. Could it be that we are blind to certain invisible, spiritual realities that are influencing our lives? What is it that gives you the willingness and strength to keep fighting your sinful tendencies? Where does this strength and determination come from? Why do you persevere in going to confession? What keeps you going back to Mass and communion? Why do you persevere in your life of prayer even when you derive no satisfaction from it? Why continue praying during times of dryness and desolation? What is it that keeps you from being crushed and overwhelmed by life's burdens and trials? How is it that, in spite of the evils that surround and threaten us in this world, we can still look to the future with a kind of confidence and hope? I believe the answer to all these questions is that all this is made possible because we are in Christ Jesus—we are intimately united to Him by grace, by faith, by love and it is from this union that we are able to continue to move forward.

Having received this great light, the revelation of the mystery of God's plan of salvation and all that God has done for us and is even now doing for us in Christ Jesus, how does St. Paul respond to all of this? He responds with a spirit full of praise and thanksgiving. He is full of awe and reverence and gratitude for what God has accomplished and is doing even now in those who believe. So we might also ask ourselves: Are those the sentiments that fill our hearts? Do we frequently find ourselves with an interior spirit of praise and thanksgiving to God for all that He has done for us and is accomplishing even now? If not, what might be the cause of our lack of a spirit of praise and thanksgiving? Could it be because we are not fully in touch with reality? Could it be that we are not seeing things as they really are and are not realizing the greatness of what God has accomplished for us?

One of the things that these reflections manifest to us, is that the human mind, by its own natural, native powers doesn't have the capacity to be in

touch with the whole of reality. Men, by nature, lack the ability to be in touch with the most important realities, unless a super-added light be given to their minds—the light of faith. That is why the little old grandmother with a deep faith, is more in touch with reality (and more sane) than the very learned university professor who has not received the gift of faith.

Modern man tends to react rather strongly against anyone who makes the claim that they are in firm possession of the truth with regard to the larger and more important questions of human life: Where do we come from? Where are we going? Is the human soul immortal? Can we know God? Modern man thinks that anyone who claims to possess sure and unfailing truth about these things is obviously proud and arrogant. But is that really the case? What we, as Catholics, profess is that we do have a very certain knowledge about these things, not because we are smarter than other people, not because we are better or more morally upright than other people, but because God has given us the light of faith. We believe what He has told us about these things and we accept what He has told us as true. For a man to submit his mind to a greater and higher mind than his own is not an act of pride and arrogance, but an act of humility.

Sometimes monks and religious are accused of choosing to live a kind of life that is an escape from reality. They are accused of not living in the *real world*. As I see it, monks and religious, and devout laymen as well, who are striving to live according to their faith—these are the ones who are striving to get in touch with reality. And the more we get in touch with reality, the more real we will become ourselves. If you would like to grow in sanity and if you would like to ground yourself more firmly in the real world, I would recommend a close and prayerful reading of St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians. ✣