



Rediscovering the Art of Reverence, by John O'Donohue

What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach. Many of the ancient cultures practiced careful rituals of approach. An encounter of depth and spirit was preceded by careful preparation.

When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace. [...]

In order to become attentive to beauty, we need to rediscover the art of reverence. Our world seems to have lost all sense of reverence. We seldom even use the word any more. The notion of reverence is full of riches that we now need desperately. Put simply, it is appropriate that a human being should dwell on this earth with reverence. As children we become aware of the word 'reverence' as used to describe the way a person is present in prayer or liturgy. When a priest celebrated the mass with a sense of reverence, you sensed the depth of his presence to the mystery. Though the church was full of people, he was absorbed in something that could not be seen. Ultimately, reverence is respect before mystery.

But it is more than an attitude of mind; reverence is also physical – a dignified attention of body showing that sacred is already here. Reverence is not to be reduced to a social posture. Reverence bestows dignity and it is only in light of dignity that the beauty and mystery of a person will become visible. Reverence is not the stiff pious posture which remains frozen and lacks humour and play. To live with a sense of reverence is not to become a prisoner of dull piety.

Playfulness, humour, and even a sense of the anarchic are companions of reverence because they insist on the proper proportion of the human presence in the light of the eternal. Reverence is also the companion of humility. When human hubris intrudes on or manipulates the sacred, the consequence is inevitably humiliation. In contrast, a sense of reverence includes the recognition that one is always in the presence of the sacred.

To live with reverence is to live without judgment, prejudice and the saturation of consumerism. The consumerist heart becomes empty and lonesome because it has squandered reverence. As parent, child, lover, prayer or artist – a sense of reverence opens pathways to beauty to surprise us. The earth is full of thresholds where beauty awaits the

wonder of our gaze.

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