

## “Through All”

Recently the Greek preposition *diapantos* caught my attention which translates as “always” and is a combination of the preposition *dia* (through) and the adjective *pan* (all). That means *diapantos* translates literally as “through all.” You find it in Paul’s epistles as when he exhorts his audience to prayer and perseverance. Although I had been aware of this some years ago, recently it caught my fancy again as a neat way of speaking about our relationship with God through prayer. When I first hit upon *diapantos* it had remained in the background as having some potential to be fleshed out further. Thus that interval time could be described as a period of incubation where the term more or less remained subconsciously present and at work although in somewhat obscure fashion. With this in mind, the current article is an opportunity to explore the meaning of *diapantos* a bit further, that is, in light of the sentiment of gratitude with which it isn’t associated directly or in the original sense.

Not only that, exploration of *diapantos* led to the formulation of a new term, if you will, dubbed “non-begetting.” While that’s spelled out in a specific article on this homepage, the idea also is found scattered in several other articles on the Lectio site as well. Here isn’t the place to delve into it, though it’s worth mentioning to say that *diapantos* and non-begetting tie into each other. In brief we can define non-begetting as a non-judgmental perception of reality minus our likes and dislikes as everything comes into being...is begotten...and then fades away. It’s a kind of standing apart as an observer while at the same time being within the rise and fall of everything that exists. Also we could say that we look-through (*dia*) reality or *pan* (all, everything), if you will, in all simplicity or taking it all in while refraining from the desire to change the slightest thing. This has the somewhat mysterious, almost magical, capacity to let *pan* fade away on its own without our interference. Then, of course, something new arises to take its place and so on *ad infinitum*.

We could single out a number of important ideas within the Judaeo-Christian tradition that have a lasting impact. And so for the sake of clarification, we could say that *diapantos* represents one half of them whereas the other half is the more well known idea of a person as made in the image and likeness of God. The most familiar Greek term here, of course, is *eikon* for image. However, it differs from

the original Hebrew *tselem* which means a shadow. Also *demoth* as “likeness” working with *tselem* suggests a relationship between a person and the shadow he casts, the two being inseparable though obviously very different. This fits in well with the absolute nature of God and the more or less unsubstantial nature of human beings relative to it.

Another way to view this is to consider God while the shadow or person follows exactly in line with him. As is the case with a conventional shadow, the speed of light connects the two, unbelievably fast. Should you stay with this image a bit, the inescapable nature of a shadow following its “original” has an element of imitation and therefore play about it where attention is focused more upon the movement involved, not the inescapable bond proper to the shadow. All in all, it gives the added perception that you-as-shadow are being watched continuously. Such observation turns out to be a critical component deserving of examination in its own right, and here is not the place for it.

Other elements may be included, but we’ll wait and see how this short article or another following it develops. Most likely the next candidate is a closer examination of *eikon* from the *lectio divina* point of view. For now what seems to be evolving is, for lack of a better term, the search for a catch-all point of view. Within it are tossed a number of elements which each of us confronts every day but don’t take the time to reflect upon and articulate. We haven’t learned to pause from our habitual train of thought and imagings in order to carry this out, let alone see patterns in them. Then again, we may not bother simply because we haven’t found value in the endeavor. Everything and everyone around us militates against this...not willingly, of course, but more or less blindly.

So let’s start off with an over-arching category described as the relationship between the particular and the general. While it remains inclusive and somewhat tenuous to nail down, it has the potential of opening the door to all sorts of speculation. The advantage lies in the fact that that it’s a kind of base camp from which we can move out and explore what’s unknown and bring that unknown into greater understanding. It might be better to call this unknown that which we don’t reflect upon consciously but also are aware of requiring greater clarification throughout our lives. On top of this is the realization that life doesn’t go on forever. It comes to a halt, and we don’t know if this will be sooner or later. To

miss out on exploring all that comes before would be a real loss and make death seem like an extinction instead of a transition to something we know is out there but can't quite put our finger on.

Another way of putting this relationship between the particular and general (i.e., us vs. them, in its crudest form) is to observe how we handle our personal identity, the one imposed as well as given to us since birth. We move through life with the two always interacting, early on having achieved several general characteristics that will abide for the rest of our years. By the time one graduates from high school these characteristics are established sufficiently firm enough that we view much of life through them. In other words, there's no such thing as pure objectivity which, if it existed, would make life quite dull. Then we advance through the bulk of life called middle age, attain retirement and look back with a certain wisdom of having survived it all. At the same time this wisdom is relative. Society and culture lack the tools and means to flesh this out which is unfortunate because people can be left wallowing in their final years of life even though they might be well off financially speaking.

Another way of putting all this is that we're creating a personal history that takes shape over the long term as when we're drawn to a particular pursuit. It may have begun as a hobby or some particular interest but assumes greater clarity when we embark upon the educative journey. Then, of course, we step down from our career, retirement, for example. Ideally speaking the bulk of our lives before retirement should be characterized by *paideia*, a Greek word which means not just education but a whole attitude of being inquisitive with regard to all aspects of life. Certainly crises are bound to hit us on the way. They call it into question what seems to test this enterprise called *paideia* and make us wonder if we've been deceiving ourselves. There seems to be a greater perception of this lack of *paideia* in recent years meaning that the lifelong educative process is not only misunderstood by has been lost.

We all experience a number of monkey wrenches thrown into our lives, the benefit of which comes into clearer light when some time has past. Here is where a certain relative wisdom takes shape. "Relative" in the sense that it isn't necessarily of the religious or philosophical variety we tend to associate with that word. More precisely, we're dealing with a *relative* diminution of our habitual

folly. Exactly when or where it started out is hard to pin down, but that's irrelevant here. The main point is that we've acquired it little by little yet lack the guidance as how to articulate it. Involved, of course, is the undoing of a whole array of foolish behavior and thought patterns. As for the value of the passage of time, it makes one wiser because illusory beliefs garnered over the years are shed by reason of a more one-on-one contact with reality. Note the words "are shed." That suggests we don't do the shedding but become aware of these beliefs being dropped after the passage of some time.

What's important here is that attraction to forms (and that just about covers everything when you come right down to it), whether inner or outer, is diminished. Beliefs which had sustained us throughout life come into clearer light and are recognized as contributing to the folly we've displayed either to ourselves or more embarrassingly, to other persons. Obviously not all beliefs are harmful but looked as in terms of form, ultimately they fall under the category of that which is pretty much useless. To see this requires a displacement of our attention away from forms...not completely...but boiled down to a relatively few of them. Or putting it in another way, we use these forms just enough to get through life with minimum fuss and bother. That brings up a tantalizing question. Will we reach a "zero point" when we have no form? Yes, but that comes with death which is why practicing this diminishment of form is a good preparation for it.

From time to time we get insight into the dynamics of our obsession with form or more precisely, when it weakens its hold upon our attention<sup>1</sup>. One concrete example is during moments of feeling grateful. Either someone does something for us or we've hit upon a bit of good fortune. Usually it happens unexpectedly which shifts our attention from our more or less habitual folly to something coming from outside the normal course of our lives. All our commonplace

1 As for form liturgically speaking, we can use Pentecost as an example. It commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit after the Ascension of Jesus Christ. While an important feast day, the role of the Spirit (*Pneuma* means breath) is little appreciated. Part of the reason seems to be that until this point focus has been upon Jesus Christ who is, generally put, a form. With the Spirit's advent this form or *morphe* is exchanged for something intangible or pretty close to it. Still, it seems, we haven't come quite to grips with how to deal with this transition of *morphe* to *pneuma* except in vague, general terms.

thoughts are suspended while we direct full attention upon the unexpected gift that has fallen into our hands. Yes, images of who or what made us grateful abide, but our focus is more upon the sentiment of gratitude which has a life of its own.

While this is a general type of gratitude familiar to everyone, a deeper one exists. This one we feel quite literally in our bones, for it's more immediate than any spiritual or mental perception though obviously spills over there. To be sure, such moments are precious but don't last long. However, their memory lingers longer than usual recollections of gratitude which means they have a lasting impact in our memory.

So, then, what is meant by this gratitude we feel literally in our bones? It's so deep that we feel it animating our skeletal structure which in turn spreads out to our physical bodies. Our physicality comes before our thought processes meaning that they have an immediate...no intermediary...contact with what it perceives. While we go about our regular lives which means allowing the usual flow of thoughts and emotions to take their course, this feeling in our skeletal structure (for lack of better term) remains. True to its nature, the skeleton is hidden within the body without which it can't assume proper shape. So we could say that this profound feel for gratitude is like that. It gives shape to the rest of our body and then spills over into our minds and spirits.

It's not uncommon that part of our response to this all-encompassing gratitude gives rise to some frustration. Why can't we feel it throughout the day? Obviously we're taken up with a multitude of concerns that crowd in upon us, hence our perception is diluted. This sets up a prolonged conflict between memories of deep gratitude and our frustration of not being able to insert them into our life at the moment. Of course we know the limitations to our ability in maintaining this which gives a certain tragic twinge to our lives. Nevertheless we persist but with a perpetual gnawing sound in the background we'd love to silence. Living with this lack of reconciliation (for want of a better word) is a drag, and we go about our lives with a tinge of melancholy, even regret, at our failure to live up to our desire to respond. Always we alternate between a deep feel of gratitude and its dissipation. Getting used to it takes some time, is part of

the *paideia* experience, and shouldn't be thought of as some kind of defect in our character by reason of not being able to sustain some sort of idealized balance.

A desire to alleviate what we perceive as an imbalance may not be in the forefront of our radar since we don't feel mortally threatened or the like. Thus we relegate it to the background where it prefers to sulk. But should we look at it from a number of angles, not long we discover that our perception of time is the culprit. And if time, that necessarily involves space, the two being inextricably tied together. Experience tells us that gratitude suspends awareness of time's passage, no doubt there. This little taste makes us want more and to keep time suspended, but we are unable to do so. Such is the real crux of our unhappiness. So we let it go like that, thinking it's the way life is which isn't necessarily true.

The idea that we can be grateful all the time can appear a bit forced, even naive. Because of this we have to get to a level transcending any peripheral or passing sentiment about it. However, such resolve doesn't provide a clue as to where it will lead us. At this juncture it's important to realize we're on solid ground insofar as we wish to plumb the depths of gratitude and make it part of our awareness as constant as possible instead of a little bit here and a little bit there. Such is one entry point into *diapantos*...that word spoken of at the beginning of this essay meaning literally through-everything.

Even if we don't feel particularly grateful at the moment it doesn't prevent us from examining all the aspects which constitute ourselves. Reflection leads to the inevitable conclusion that gratitude stands out as being that which is closest to us as well as the best avenue to get outside ourselves. It appears to be the only attribute with genuine staying power and can be accessed by everyone. In that light it seems to be a good vehicle for prayer, and indeed we hear of gratitude as an essential ingredient for it. However, most of the talk is done superficially or without reflection in the sense of not pausing to consider its essential dynamics. For this reason any discussion of value to it is limited and lacks staying power to effect the change we crave even if we're uncertain as to what this may be.

So taking into consideration concrete remembrances of gratitude, we see that above all else, they're the best experiences in our lives. Great, but the problem is not capitalizing upon them, milking this insight for all its worth. Reflecting

further shows that when we're grateful time is suspended, a crucial observation mentioned several paragraphs above. And that comes down to what we desire the most, to escape the limits of time and therefore space. It remains a vague idea, though, in that we haven't a real clue as what we'd do should we actually attain it. In other words, "What then?," to put it a bit crudely but right to the point.

"What then?" reveals our insatiable desire for more, a need to be ensconced permanently in a state of being grateful instead of having glimpses of it here and there. During these intervals (for lack of a better term) when we're grateful we find ourselves in a potentially precarious position. Their fleeting nature can make us more vulnerable to circumstances that eventually thwart the sentiment. We tire of the alteration between having gratitude and not having it. In normal situations we'd brush this off but not in an instance when we're more vulnerable. Furthermore our condition is aggravated when we attempt to capture such an instance instead of letting it go. Nevertheless, this is beneficial insofar as we're being taught, albeit painfully, how to deal with this situation. It all boils down to governing the rush of thoughts that go through our heads.

Memories garnered from immediate contact with the world push us in one direction, then another and so on *ad infinitum*. If we were of a suspicious nature, these forces seem to conspire to keep us away from fostering a sense of gratitude. Maybe there is a force behind it; who knows, but that's secondary to the task at hand. When we either recall, encounter someone or something that makes us grateful, we come to realize what we take as the normal flow of events is a veil as well as force pushing us in a direction not proper to our nature. This is rather difficult to articulate properly because it's no easy matter to step outside our daily experiences. Also the "veil" that both covers and deceives us is accepted by everyone around us which nowadays assumes the form of media in all its varying guises.

So the way to be grateful in a permanent fashion is no easy task. At the same time it isn't beyond our capacity. The obstacles turn out to be ones of our own creation re-enforced by society and culture. Recognizing this is the first and most important step in remedying the situation which leads to a new, refreshing insight into the practice of humility. This oft-misunderstood virtue is our best

ally in disposing ourselves for gratitude in the more permanent sense. We become aware constantly of our failings and short-comings but not in a way that will bring us down and keep us there. Insights into these personal limitations become less painful and more abiding, if you will. They tend to hang around and strange to say, put us at ease.

The end-game here is to effect a slight withdrawal from that transpiring within us as well as without us even if the two are bombarding us constantly. "Slight" in that we don't engage in any major ascetical drama, just a stepping back sufficiently, far enough to assess the situation without passing judgment on ourselves or on any external circumstance. Then at once and quietly some kind of presence other than ourselves (it's also other than anything human) steps in. It doesn't take control of us but is present with us, watching perpetually and of all things, imparting a sense of humor as to what's going on. This humor is quite literally supernatural in the literal sense of being above or beyond that which is natural to us. And if we're able to latch on to it, automatically we become grateful for the privilege of going along for the ride. If we try to discover something better, we don't succeed. In effect nothing can top this. Our external circumstance hasn't changed at all but our way of perceiving it.

Earlier in this document I said that a permanent sense of gratitude is within our reach. Even if we struggle with it, in the larger scheme of things, there's nothing better with which to be preoccupied. Now with the influx of this new presence which reveals in a quiet fashion the humor of everything, we adjust our language and know that to perceive it *diapantos* or through everything is the real goal in life.

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