

The late Father Henri Nouwen was a renowned academic at Notre Dame, Harvard and Yale who gave up his career in academia in order to work and reside in the L'Arche community in Richmond Hill. As I think most of you know L'Arche is a movement that provides care for people with mental and physical disabilities in a home-like environment. At one point in his life, having experienced some stress and burnout, he took a break and lived in the Cistercian monastery at Genesee in New York State.

While there, he of course entered into the routine of the monastery of prayer and work. Monastic life is quiet, repetitive and pretty mundane. As he reflects on this life he contrasted it to his previous days as a professor where he was constantly on the move giving talks, retreats and leading seminars.

He says, "The monastic life is indeed very unsensational. I keep catching myself with the desire to do something special, to make a contribution, to add something new, and have to remind myself constantly that the less I am noticed, the less special attention I require, the less I am different, the more I am living the monastic life... The mystery of God's love is that in this sameness we discover our uniqueness. That uniqueness has nothing to do with the specialties we have to offer that glitter like the artificial silver balls on a Christmas tree, but has everything to do with our most personal and intimate relationship with God. **When we have given up the desire to be different and experienced ourselves as sinners without any right to special attention, only then is there space to encounter our God** who calls us by our own name and invites us into his intimacy."

In my homily a few weeks back I referred to an article which spoke of the “experience economy.” At the time that the Raptors were in the finals their daily reports of the incredible prices that people were paying for tickets and this journalist used this expression, “experience economy” to explain why. To live and experience some momentous event is what has value today. The moments of celebrity, fame and glitter are worth the expense.

In our second reading today from the letter to the Hebrews the sacred author speaks about the experience of God, “You have come to Mount Zion and of the city of the living God the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the innumerable Angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant.” You have come; we have come to the greatest experience that is possible- the kingdom of heaven, the presence of God in our midst.

But do we realize that the experience of God is not part of the experience economy. As the Gospel tells us we arrive when we choose the lower place, when we sit down with those who cannot pay us back. **When we have given up the desire to be different and experienced ourselves as sinners without any right to special attention, only then is there space to encounter our God.** When we let go of the desire to somehow belong in the best seats and accept that all seats are the same then there is space to encounter God.