

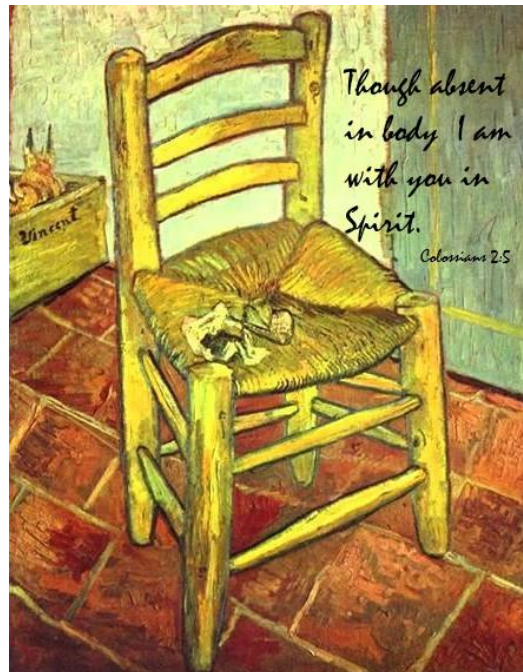
Absence

Sometimes God feels very far away, or just plain absent. What's going on when I feel like that? How can I pray when I feel like that? Has God stopped loving me?

For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ. Colossians 2:5

To be absent is to be away from a person, or a place: it is an act of departure from your expected and natural belonging. So all absence holds the echo of some fractured intimacy, but the intimacy came first, and then, when it was broken, the absence filled the heart. The most common experience of absence is when you lose a friend who is close to you.

When you open yourself to the activity and sacrament of friendship with someone, you create a unique and particular kind of space with them; a special space that you share in the same way with no one else. And when the friend departs - when a relationship breaks or when you lose someone in that final severance that we call death - absence haunts your heart and makes your belonging sore and painful. In some way, there is still within you some kind of innocence that is either unable or unwilling to accept that the person has finally gone and forever. So absence is never clear-cut. Everyone that leaves your life leaves a subtle trail of connection with you; and when you think of them, and miss them and desire them, your heart journeys out again along that trail towards them in the elsewhere that they now find themselves.



Paradoxically it's when we have the awareness and appreciation of absence, the empty chair, that we feel and taste a sense of presence.

Thought for today: Look at the vacant chair and cast your mind back and reflect.

With thanks to John Quinn, broadcaster, on John O'Donohue *Walking on the Pastures of Wonder*