

God Knows What We Need
Memoir of Sr. Bernice



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Prayer

In our community prayer book, we had morning prayers, and prayers before noon and after noon, and night prayers and so forth that we said together. And then we did have some time to go to the chapel and just be quiet. Through the years, I kind of dropped book prayers, pretty much. Mostly, I sit quietly in the presence of God. I pray in my room, here, more than I go to the chapel to pray or anything because I'm distracted in the chapel with people coming in and out. I have to see everything. And in my room, I'm not distracted. Night prayers, I say words a bit then, but it more starts out with, "May we, as a BVM community, be the community God wants us to be especially in these changing times." And then I pray for peace in the world and peace especially in the troubled parts of the world. And then our congregation assigns some of the older sisters an active sister to pray for. I've had 2, this year it seems to be down to one, but it's the same one. I still pray for both of them because it seems unnatural to leave one out now after I've prayed for them for so long. But anyways, I pray that she, or both of them if I'm praying for both of them, will be happy and holy and productive religiously, that they produce good things in their life. And for all my nieces and nephews and everyone I've dealt with in my life, especially in the various ministries I've been in. And I pray that today and the next hours and this week, that we will all love and serve God with all our heart and mind and soul and that we will love our neighbor as ourselves. They asked Jesus what to do to gain eternal life and that's what he said to do, so that's what I pray, that we will all do, everyone I've known in my whole life. So that's my night prayer. Of course the Mass is the greatest of all prayers, and I believe that when the Mass is going on, I don't just sit and listen. I say all the words to the Mass to myself. I pray the Mass, in other words. I think God knows what we need before we ask Him or before we speak and say it, but it seems to be His way to listen to our prayers, to be interested in us expressing what is important in our lives.

Finding God

I think I often feel God in the people around me or others that I might find inspiring and their presence. Often, one of my nieces and nephews sticks out in my mind as one of them. And I think Obama is inspiring because he seems to be so much for the real good of the people, or wants to have it anyways. My morning prayer before I settle down to be quiet with God, I start out with Scripture quotes. I have some books that kind of lend to that and then the prayers in the Mass: the Gospel of the day. I think the Beatitudes would be my favorite Scripture. Blessed are the poor in spirit, and so forth. Today is the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple, and Simeon says, "Now I shall dismiss my servant because"...that whole thing. I always think that must have been a "wow" experience because he had prayed he wouldn't see death until he saw the Messiah and then he realizes this is what it was. And the faith it must have taken to see it in this baby. To

think that God became man is just an unbelievable statement anyways, and to think he was just a baby. That's a whole lot to think about.

Life Stories

I was the youngest of five children. They were 12, 10, 8 and 6 years older than I. And the oldest was a girl, and two boys, and a girl. When my mother was pregnant with the younger of the 2 sisters, my sister is only 6 years older than I, it was during the time of the Flu Epidemic of 1919. My mother had the flu when she was pregnant with Helen, and there were 3 older children, and my dad had to stay home from work because there wasn't anybody. And you couldn't even get a doctor, there was so much flu going on. My dad said that he didn't know what to do for her, and the neighbor lady would come to the backdoor everyday and hand him some soup to give my mother. And he spooned the soup into her mouth. And my dad, who'd never used alcoholic beverages because his father was an alcoholic and my dad was so against it. While he never used it, he had some in the house and he spooned my mother some alcoholic beverage, and that got her going through it the whole time.

After my sister was born in May and that summer, they went to the park for a picnic with their 4 children. My dad went off to get some water to bring back to the picnic table, and while they were over there, my mother noticed three men sitting at a table together. They thought they were staring at her. When my dad came back, she said, "Pat, those three men are staring at me." He said, "Oh no, Grace. They're not." She said, "I sure feel like they have been." And in a minute or so, the three of them came over to their table and asked who they were, if their last name was Daly. My parents didn't know these men but knew that they were doctors in town. When they go the realization then that these men had come over to ask them what they did to keep my mother alive with the flu and being pregnant at the same time. Because they said that as far as they knew, there was no pregnant lady in our town of 30,000 people who was pregnant and lived through the flu. And my mother, they said, was the only one and when they talked to other doctors, no one knew who took care of them. So they wanted to know who took care of them. My dad kind of laughed and said, "Well, I did." They asked, "Why?" And he said, "Well you were all sick, I couldn't get a doctor. I had to stay home because I had three little children at home, so I took care of them." "Well, what did you do for them?" So, he told them what he had done to keep my mother alive, and she never was real well when we were little, but especially when I was born.

But I had a very fun childhood, and my dad always did a lot of work around the house. And as a kid, I would follow him around every place he went. I went to Catholic school until 8th grade. I lived about 5 blocks west of school and by that time, the older ones were all in high school. I think I had a carefree life, when I was old enough that my brother didn't have to care for me. I did a lot of exploring in places no one ever knew that I went. We had, some miles from our house, a gully that the train went through. And I'd go over there and go down there and into the gully to see what was going on there. So I liked fooling around and seeing the world.

Discerning for Religious Life

Even when I was in grade school, pretty young, I became interested in how the BVMs lived. I took music lessons in the convent, and I got to see how they lived. I think they impressed me because they sing happy. So, I did, even in grade school, think of it. After junior high, they had invited some of us down to see their mother house in St. Louis, and so I went down on the train with them. I went to where they were received into their community and professed their vows. I was impressed with the ceremonies, and all that, but they spoke German. They are a German order and in their mother house, they spoke German. That wasn't my cup of tea. My sister was very unhappy that I went down there, because there was a high school down there that was like the beginning of entering their order. She thought that I was going to come back and want to join the order. We shared a bedroom, so we were very close. She didn't want me leaving home that early. She was expressing this to my parents when I was down there, and they said, "We'll handle it, you don't worry about it." But when I came back, I didn't talk about wanting to go down there. So I went on to high school then which was run by our community. They had Clark College. My sister went to Clark College when I went to first grade, so I was in and out of Clark College for four years. But anyways, I just went on to high school and didn't say much about it until in the middle of my senior year of high school, we had a high school retreat.

Again, I was thinking I wanted to be what they were, the sisters. I felt like it was what I was meant to do. So I don't think I said anything to anybody about it until April after the retreat. I wanted to get my folks together to tell them together. My sisters were dating and my brothers were living at home, so it didn't seem like there was any time to see my dad. Suddenly he'd get up and go upstairs, and once he was upstairs you couldn't talk to him because he was already on his knees saying his prayers. The next thing you knew, he was asleep. So finally one Saturday, when my mother and I were making beds or changing the sheets, I told her that I wanted to do that. But I didn't want her to tell my dad, I was going to do that myself. She was very quiet about it. She was very calm about it, she didn't say too much one way or the other. And I didn't get with my father to tell him, so finally she told him.

He was taking me to school in the morning and when he was pulled up to the school, he said to me, "I hear you want to go to Mt. Caramel in September." "My mother told you?" "Yes," he said. Then, his next words were, "All my life, I prayed that one of my children would give themselves to God's service." And I just started crying. He said when it got down to the last, he didn't think it would happen. Wherever he got that, I don't know, because we didn't have any relatives who had been in a religious order. I would say he had a strong faith. By the time I was in 4th or 5th grade, my folks went to Mass every day at 6:00 in the morning.

When my dad said to me, "I hear you want to be a sister," I burst out crying and so did he. I didn't think he'd ever object to my becoming one but I thought he'd say, "Why don't you go to college for a few years first." Because I was pretty young going through school. I graduated from high school when I was 16 and entered when I was barely 17. Had turned 17 that month. In those days, that was young, it'd be very young today.

In Iowa, there's not much public transportation going north and south, so they drove me up there. My sister, the closest to me in age, had gotten married in June of that year. In fact, she pushed back her job so we wouldn't be leaving that very same year. She came up to visit. My brother Mark was in the car with my sister, my parents and me. I cried all the way. But it was fine. We got into the parlor at Dubuque. It wasn't obligatory, but it was kind of a practice that if you entered the community, you paid for your board and room for 6 months. Then in March, there was a ceremony and you were received into the community, and then by that time, the community would support you. So Dad thought he could contribute to my first 6 months. He went off to see somebody about that. My mother, Helen and I were sitting there, and this sister who was in charge of us when we first entered the community, came in and we got to know her a little bit. Some cabs came over from Clark College because other young people were entering the same day and had come from all over the United States. They were acting real crazy as they were coming in. They were throwing their cigarettes and joking around, and my mother watched them come in. Then she says, "We can leave now, you'll fit in with that crowd."

Reflection on Life

I think I was blessed with a good relationship with God for so much of my life because my family was so dedicated to God and religion. I was thinking today if I've had difficulties with my faith and I suppose so, but not so much. It's just been part of my life and if the externals around me were difficult to some degree, that's life. It's kind of expected. Life wasn't meant to be so easy all the time. I think living through the Depression showed that life isn't always simple. But I think I've had a marvelous life and I don't remember much of it being that difficult in that way. Maybe because of growing up in the Depression years, you don't expect it to be all roses. I guess my relationship with God has always been how it is. I don't know if my life was typical. It seems to me that in some ways, I kind of sailed through. Maybe with my disposition or the way it was at home, in spite of the Depression. We never expected to have the world in a fence. I never felt deprived. But one of the worst things to ever happen in my life was when a train that was going to Burlington came crashing down a hill and killed 75 or 80 people. These were people that worked in the next small town, West Burlington, and they used to catch the train downtown. Everybody in town seemed to have someone of theirs die. We didn't though. Everybody's sorrow was weighty on anyone, even someone young. I was probably in 7th Grade.

I think I had an unusually good life, both there and in the community. I don't know if it was my attitude or my upbringing or the community itself. But I sure never felt deprived of things that would make you happy or joyful. I think one of the joys of religious life was teaching. There was always a part of teaching religion. I think that was always very satisfying to see others grow in faith and enjoy God's presence in their lives.