

God's Like Bubbling Through Us
Memoir by Sister Patricia



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we access God’s presence.”*

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I tried to think of music or poems that captured, for me, how I sensed that God was a part of my life. I have five segments of life here and either a song or poem to go with some of them.

First Segment

What came to me was the song, "*Lovely Lady Dressed in Blue.*" It went,

"Lovely lady dressed in blue/
teach me how to pray/
God was just your little boy/
You must know that way/
Did you lift him up some time gently on your knee/
Did you speak to him the way
Mother does to me?"

I imagined God as a parent in my early years, certainly in grade school and through high school. In those years, Mary was so important. It was like there was another God called Mary. I didn't mind imagining God as a parent because I had a loving father and a loving mother. I realized how blessed I was that my parents were very kind and had this image of God. I remember that my parents would always say, "It doesn't matter that you go to Church or what you say in Church. It's how you live and what you do to each other." I can still remember one time, after coming home from Church, my brother and I started arguing or doing something right away. My mom came in, and she said, "How can you do that? You just came from Church." So I knew there was a connection to going to Church and what you did in life.

I played the organ, this little tiny, old-fashioned pump organ where you push with your feet to get the air out. I played for morning Mass every morning and went to daily Mass from fourth grade and on. That was kind of my prayer life, being at Mass.

There was the sense that God was in my life as a parent. There was God the Father, a God who would take care of me. My part of the deal was to behave and to be consistent and to go to Church and live a certain way. I would say that was my image of God.

Second Segment

When I entered religious life, we had daily instruction on what it meant to choose to be religious. I can remember the day of my first profession. Our novice director used to let us outside during the mornings to do our meditation. She would frequently give us poetry that meant a lot to her. The poem began, "*The last lone day is streaking across the sky for you.*" I had not been able to remember what came next, but I remember that poem was very comforting because it was the sense that of making these vows and these commitments and looking to Jesus

Christ as the ideal. The vows were an expression of a certain way to commit our lives to a community that was dependent and inspired by Jesus Christ.

I started my religious life with the sense of a more individual spirituality. As I had an opportunity to study the Scriptures, the more I realized that there was a whole community experience of God and of Jesus. That became very enlivening. Since I entered religious life, I've always made a choice to take some quiet time, just about every day. It is a regular part of my life. What I sensed was something bigger, that prayer was a meditation, and the Scriptures were helpful. Reading them gives an insight into how the Biblical communities were struggling to make God a part of their life. It helped me very much in experiencing a sense of spirituality in a communal way. Being part of a faith community had a lot more importance to me at that time. I value the choice to take my own time, to sense how God is present with me in a very personal way, but the community dimension developed through this also.

I had made my final vows in the late 60's. It was a time when there were lots of turmoil in the Church and religious life. A lot of people were choosing not to continue religious life. But I still wanted to do this. I thought, maybe the BVMs aren't going to be around forever, but here I am making a perpetual, final commitment: I'm making this commitment to the Church; a commitment to God, especially to Jesus Christ. It still felt right to do it.

Third Segment

I spent time in Ecuador in struggling neighborhoods. This was nourished for me by reading and studying liberal theology, which teaches that God made a special option for those who were most struggling in life and were oppressed. That's where God can be found. That was very true for me. I remember being so excited about it. A song we used to sing in Ecuador and that stayed with me was from Carlos Mahin Duron. It translates, "*Oh God, you are a God of the poor, a God who's human and simple, a God who sweats in the street, a God who's got a ruddy face.*" Those words are just an example of how intimately those people celebrated their presence in His midst. He wasn't a God on a throne, but a God who struggles with them, who looked like them, and who was peasant who worked. That was an exciting part.

Fourth Segment

There's a poem called, "The Fountain" by Denise Lovertov. I still like that poem a whole lot.

The Fountain

Don't say, don't say there is no water
to solace the dryness at our hearts.

I have seen

the fountain springing out of the rock wall
and you drinking there. And I too
before your eyes

found footholds and climbed
to drink the cool water.

The woman of that place, shading her eyes,
frowned as she watched-but not because
she grudged the water,

only because she was waiting
to see we drank our fill and were
refreshed.

Don't say, don't say there is no water.
That fountain is there among its scalloped
green and gray stones,

it is still there and always there
with its quiet song and strange power
to spring in us,

up and out through the rock.

I loved that poem because of the image of a fountain as divine life that moves very naturally in the sense that it has a deep source, but is very natural. Natural fountains tap into a deep-water source and then find a way to come fourth. I believe the deeper we go into ourselves and the deeper we are in life, we access God's presence—the sense of accessing God's presence is in that depth. But also, God's like bubbling through us. The poem speaks to me of God's presence, a faithful, on-going presence. I love the woman of that place. I think that in earlier times of my life, I would pick up images of God measuring our goodness. We had to earn our favors. That captured for me a much fuller sense of God. A God of abundance, not trying to build on scarcity, but that we drank our full and we're refreshed. I imagined that woman in the poem as God. I like that poem a lot because of that image of a fountain as a calming movement and naturalness. It's a water fountain connection to life.

Fifth Segment

A poem by Mary Oliver has come to mean a lot to me called, "Praying." It has meant so much to me. I read it early on last year when I was starting my Sabbatical. It really became like a container of how I wanted to shape that year.

Praying

It doesn't have to be
the blue iris, it could be
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few
small stones; just
pay attention, then patch

a few words together and don't try
to make them elaborate, this isn't
a contest but the doorway

into thanks, and a silence in which
another voice may speak.

~ Mary Oliver ~

Whatever is happening in my life, I just pay attention. The poem made me more and more aware of the importance of making sure that I did quiet devotions and having a time when I could make sure I was paying attention to God. Prayer was about patching together a few words and not making it too complicated. This isn't a contest, but a doorway. It's moving into something bigger than us and to give another voice the chance to speak. Spiritually, it's that of whatever is surrounding me. I feel myself so much a part of this whole development. Whatever happened a billion years ago, it's still a part of us.

What the poem captures is that the most common things can be spiritual. For me, I realize how important it is to keep in contact with beauty. It doesn't have to be fancy beauty—just noticing beauty. It's a way to make sure I'm nourished and to have a sense of God's presence. It energizes me. Beauty can be seen in somebody's gesture or a word or might even be music. Just pay attention.

There are times when I feel more spiritually alive than others. But in some cases, it's that I'm not letting myself slow down and pay attention. In terms of spiritual dryness, I don't really get into that because I feel it's trying to measure something. Relationships have their own rhythm and struggles. In my relationship with God, there are times when I feel there is more energy and less energy, but I've never been comfortable in measuring this as much as asking myself, "Is this a good time spiritually?" Since the 1970's, I've had a spiritual advisor that I sit down with and just have a chance to talk about how I sense God's presence. I find that helpful because even if that person doesn't say anything, just having that kind of discipline makes me stop and say, "What's been happening in my life that is making me feel this way?" I never believed that God withdraws from us. I think it's more of, "Why am I unable to feel centered and focused and grounded in my life?"