

## Finding God through Creation

Earth is crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.

Elizabeth Barrett Browning

A father took his young son for a walk in the forest. Soon they stood before a huge tree and admired its beauty. "Look at its magnificence!", the father said. "It reaches toward the heavens with arms extended in praise of God! Its roots are sunk deep into mother earth where it gains nourishment. Its leaves absorb sunshine and in a mysterious way transform this energy into life. Its alive!" the father said. "But we don't understand this mystery. Come sit with me under the tree and feel its energy." As they sat down, the son felt peace settle in his heart and they remained there for a long time in silence.

During the next week in school, the son learned that the tree under which they sat was an oak. He also learned the names of many other trees and was eager to share them with his father. During their next walk in the woods, they approached the tree and the son said to his father, "I know what this tree is!" he said with delight. "It's an oak tree!" Again they sat under the tree in silence. The father put his arm around his son and said, "Remember, the two words 'oak tree' are only words and come nowhere near explaining the mystery of this tree. Your education is important but be careful it does not take away your awe and sense of God's presence in the beauty of creation."

This past summer, the heavy rains washed a lot of soil down the mountain behind our home onto our driveway, and the only way to remove it was with a shovel. It took a couple of days of hard work to finish the job. I noticed that during the process, I built up a few calluses on my hands. They were nature's protection. Although the purpose of calluses are protection, they also take away feeling. If you take a feather and gently pass it over the callused part of your hands, you can't feel it. I think we can also get calluses on our souls.

The father in the above story was trying to help his son avoid getting calluses on his soul so he doesn't go though life numb. Most of us are transplanted people. We were not raised in mountains. Think back when you first visited this beautiful area and the excitement you felt when you moved here. Do you still see the beauty? Is your breath taken away as you gaze upon the mountains? A flower? An oak tree?

Not only do calluses take away feeling, they're not very attractive either. They can be formed within marriage and family as well as our faith. We can end up going through

life numb, while people and events bounce along the surface never able to penetrate. Life can cause pain and bruises, which are inevitable. Whether or not we form calluses over them is up to each one of us.

Back in high school, one of my favorite songs was from Simon and Garfunkel, "I Am A Rock." Perhaps you remember it:

*A winter's day in a deep and dark December; I am alone, gazing from my window to the streets below; on a freshly fallen silent shroud of snow. I am a rock, I am an island. I've built walls, a fortress deep and mighty, that none may penetrate. I have no need of friendship; friendship causes pain. It's laughter and it's loving I disdain. I am a rock, I am an island.*

*Don't talk of love, but I've heard the words before; it's sleeping in my memory. I won't disturb the slumber of feelings that have died. If I never loved I never would have cried. I am a rock, I am an island.*

*I have my books and my poetry to protect me; I am shielded in my armor, hiding in my room, safe within my womb. I touch no one and no one touches me. I am a rock, I am an island. And a rock feels no pain; And an island never cries.*

I wanted to be a rock, unaffected by the pain of life, but learned that people who are like rocks don't have very happy lives. They live and die alone, even if with other people. If religion is about anything, it is about softening rocks and removing calluses.

Lent begins in six weeks, but let's get an early start. It is a season within the Liturgical Calendar to take out the pumice stone and begin filing away anger, resentment and the lack of forgiveness, which cause calluses and hurt us more than anyone else. Sometimes, rather than pumice stone, we are broken by way of sickness, divorce, family or job problems, etc. Or, we simply become fed up with going through life numb and long to become vulnerable and feel with all the intensity of being human. Christmas tells us that it is through our humanity that we encounter divinity. So, calluses on our souls hinder not only our intimacy with people, but also our intimacy with God.

Earth is crammed with heaven,  
And every common bush afire with God,  
But only he who sees takes off his shoes.  
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Jesus said, "Unbind him and let him go free."  
John 11:44

Let's open our eyes, take off our shoes and file away our calluses.

~ Henry