An Autumn Walk in the Park
by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on SEPTEMBER 18, 2017

It is a lovely late morning in early September. I decide to go for a walk in the nearby park. As soon as I pull into the parking lot, I notice something unusual: there are no other cars. I walk across the wooden bridge that leads to the path around the lake. Before I set off, I scan the area. I see no one—no one walking a dog, no one jogging, no one fishing from one of the docks. “I’m alone!” I say with excitement. “All alone!”

But as soon as I say the words, I smile. I am certainly not alone. As I start walking, I remind myself that although I may be the only human being in the park this morning, I am not the only living being. There are countless other living things with me in the park—for example the sparrows and gold finches I see flying around. I spot two ducks on the water’s edge and a gaggle of geese sitting in the middle of the lake holding some kind of a convention. I notice a few bees, hear the steady droning of some cicadas, and am startled by a couple of jumping grasshoppers showing off their athletic prowess.

And what about the living things I don’t see? The blue gills and bass in the lake. The turtles I’ve seen sunning themselves on a log. And don’t forget the elusive deer, the rabbits, the raccoons, and the bats that are probably hanging upside down sleeping in the bat house built for them. And how could I ever forget the worms, beetles, ants.

All pictures are from Best Park, Geauga County, OH.
slugs and other small creatures hiding in the brush, scurrying in the grass, or burrowing beneath the soil? And let's not forget the *flora* – the goldenrod, the Queen Anne's lace, the mushrooms, the bushes, and the trees: willows, ash, oaks, and the maples with their leaves just beginning to turn orange.

No, I am not alone. There are thousands of other living beings with me in the park. And why should I limit my companionship only to living things? What about all the so-called inanimate things that are with me as I walk—the earth I tread upon, the rocks strewn along the shore of the lake, the sun warming me, the clouds floating above me, the air I breathe, the gentle wind on my face and in my hair, and, of course, the beautiful lake itself. Aren't these all worthy of my attention and appreciation, too?

As I walk, I feel so connected to everything around me. I recall the words of the great German poet Goethe who said, "Nothing in nature is isolated; nothing is without reference to something else." And I wonder: if we really appreciated our innate connectedness to everyone and everything else, what effect would that awareness have on our interpersonal relationships, our prayer, our daily choices, our work, our laws, our foreign policy?

Father Thomas Berry, who wrote so much about the mystery and beauty of the universe, said this: "The universe is a single gorgeous celebratory event." As I walked in the park today, I thanked God for allowing me to be a part of such a gorgeous and celebratory world!

*How about some bluegrass/gospel music for today's song? This is Doyle Lawson and Quicksilver singing, "God Is Love." If you like bluegrass, turn the volume up. If you don't like bluegrass, turn the volume down and enjoy the beautiful words and pictures!*
At what times do you most feel your connectedness with everyone and everything?

Do you like Autumn? If so, why? If not, why not?

I invite you to share some of your thoughts with the rest of us...

**PS:** Thank you for your prayers for the Autumn retreat I facilitated this past weekend at Benet House in Rock Island, IL. We had 30 wonderful participants: 2 married couples, about 10 laywomen, and the rest were sisters from various communities. Special thanks to Sister Bobbi, OSB, the director of the retreat center who made everyone feel so welcome and who made everything run so smoothly!
Sr. Melannie,

Autumn has always been my favorite season even as a child. The changing color of the leaf, the smell in the air, and even the cooler evenings.

God seems more present in the season.

Kathleen

Mary Schneider  September 18, 2017 at 10:06 am

Sr Melanie:

I too awake on these cooler mornings and am aware of much of God's creation: The birds singing or honking, squirrel scurrying around for some sort of food, etc. When I arrived at our Church for Mass, the grounds were covered by geese....what a joyful sight. Thanks to our Heavenly Father for this perfect weather and all of his creation!

Jean Canatsey  September 18, 2017 at 10:07 am

We have lived in Florida for almost 25 years but every Autumn we make a trip back to Indiana. I need to drive down country roads and see the corn and soybeans turning brown and ready for the harvest. I need to walk in the woods, gaze at the turning leaves and smell the walnuts. Most of all, I need to just feel the Autumn air and remember.

Kathy Donnerrmeyer  September 18, 2017 at 10:14 am

Thanks again for your reflection today.

I feel most connected to everyone while riding the bus to work in the morning. I see all of these people, going their different ways, some to work, some to school, maybe some even to the doctor as our bus route stops at a local hospital. I try to say a quick prayer for all of them and our bus driver.
Another time I feel strongly connected is at Sunday mass, when we all join hands for the Our Father.

One other observation, I strangely felt a connection with the entire universe, past and present, while taking an afternoon walk through a local cemetery with my daughter on Saturday. It was very peaceful, but this is a very large and quite old cemetery, and I thought of all of those people who died more than a century ago, what life was like for them, etc.

Love Autumn, the only thing I don’t like is what comes after. Not a fan of winter. I often wish we could just jump from Fall to Spring.

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**Nancy**  September 18, 2017 at 10:19 am

Recently a gentleman passenger riding on the Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad thru the Cuyahoga Valley National Park talked with us about his leukemia and the doctor’s prognosis. As he looked out the window he commented how the beauty of nature speaks so loud of heaven and all of its glory. He is very much at peace! May his vibrant image of heaven lead him home.

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**Deena**  September 18, 2017 at 10:52 am

Sr Melannie,

Good Morning and thank you for the lovely post and song. I was having a hard time getting back to work and the “real world” after the lovely retreat at Benet House this weekend. Thanks to all of your followers that prayed for us and thank you for your gentleness and wisdom. I know everyone treasured our weekend together!

My job/career is not one that fulfills me or is work that fills like it connects with my heart’s desire so after a weekend, it is usually a struggle to get back to it. Before long I’m busy again and life goes on. But this a.m. I thought, take a break and check personal email. So it was lovely to find your blog post. As I sat and read it, I slowed down to hear the crickets and feel the breeze. I watch the autumn colors in the new plants I put in pots shine brightly in the morning sun. Ahhh, the connection from this weekend and the beauty of Benet House has not escaped me!
I love this season – the chill, the colors, the slowing down. Everything seems to relax a bit after the busy growing and going of summer.

Thanks for helping me reconnect with hope (I pre-ordered your book, can't wait!) and for helping us slow down and recognize God's beauty in the world around us. Peace, Deena

**REPLY**

jane Strauss  September 18, 2017 at 12:48 pm

Thank you Sister Melanie for your wonderful walk by the lake. I wish I could have shared it physically. You were not alone. Jesus walked with you and enjoyed your enjoyment. Thank you for sharing yourself with us. Jane

**REPLY**

Patty  September 18, 2017 at 1:37 pm

A lovely and uplifting reminder. Thank you, Sister.

**REPLY**

Beverly  September 18, 2017 at 1:51 pm

What a great present God gave to you! Thank you for sharing it with us!

**REPLY**

Julie T  September 18, 2017 at 3:12 pm

You have really made me aware of how God has given us such magnificent gifts that, I for one, has taken for granted in the hurry and bustle of life. But this last year especially, Ed and I have commented on all the scenery of nature each day and appreciate getting to see it again and hopefully many more times yet as we age. Thanks again for sharing your talents. We would love to visit again with you. Julie

**REPLY**
Dolores Leffler  September 18, 2017 at 3:20 pm
I too enjoy the fall weather, walking in the Summit County Metro Park trails. Doing it for 29 years but still find the beauty that seems to change each year. Thank you for reminding us of God walking with us.

REPLY

Shirley  September 18, 2017 at 7:05 pm
Thank you Sister! Your blog was great and the song was just perfect! Fall is my favorite season, I am an avid walker and I love the cool brisk mornings as I am out walking by 6:30. This is some of my most special time with God, thanking him for all my many blessings. Again Sister, thank you for your blog!!

REPLY

anita compagnone  September 18, 2017 at 8:53 pm
ahh.. It felt like I was right there in the park with you Sister. A magnificent account! thanks so much. Nita

REPLY

Tom  September 18, 2017 at 9:19 pm
I am touched by Nancy’s comment about the passenger on the CVSR, finding a preview of heaven in the beauty of the Cuyahoga Valley, a good reminder that our faith in the Risen Christ does afford us a present but not yet complete experience of heavenly bliss.

P.S. Your pictures and descriptions of Best Park reminded me of being amazed by the tenacity of weeds that found their way through the asphalt trail encircling the lake.

REPLY

Deirdre Lewis  September 19, 2017 at 1:13 am
Its spring now in Cape Town and autumn is just a memory. But autumn is my favorite time of year. The days here are still warm, the nights are cool and the summer wind has died down. Our climate is basically Mediterranean, so the winters are wet and everything is green. I’m not looking forward to summer...hot, dry and very windy! Your blog has reminded me that the seasons change at their appointed times, as our lives change. I’m happy to be in the autumn of my life, finally producing the fruits of my spring and summer! And winter is before me... cool and wet... just as I love it!!!

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**Teresa**  September 19, 2017 at 4:29 am

Hi Sister Melannie. Where I live in Singapore, its summer all year round but I did get a chance a couple of years ago to experience autumn in Kyoto, Japan and simply fell in love with it. The walks that I took with my hubby through the temple gardens and public parks were unforgettable. I felt God’s presence everywhere; the beauty and colours of autumn spoke so much of his love, for me and for all of creation. Everything spoke of abundant life, change, but also about death and the transciency of life.

*My love for the nature world and interest in Ignatian Spirituality and finding God in all things were fuelled by your books, Seeking the Holy in All Things and Meeting God in Small Things. They opened my eyes to the little, sacred things. Thank you Sister for these gems.*

Teresa

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**Thomas DeFreitas**  September 20, 2017 at 1:53 pm

A beautifully written account of a walk in the park!

Do I like autumn? Autumn is life. Autumn is everything. Autumn is celebration, invigoration, and for me, restoration. It is grateful coolness in the heat and solace in the midst of woe. It is color, it is shelter, it is adventure. It’s the bees’ knees and the cat’s pajamas. Sister, if you haven’t read it before, there are marvellous passages in praise of autumn in poet Donald Hall’s prose book *Seasons At Eagle Pond*, from sometime in the late 1980s.
Carol Kapostasy  September 23, 2017 at 11:40 pm

I attended the Catholic Charismatic Conference in Orlando this weekend & heard conflicting messages about nature, humankind, & priorities. I was heartened to read this tonight because I feel you cannot separate God's awesome creation of the planet from humankind. To me it is a communal, symbiotic coexistence I am privileged to witness. Sometimes nature is the only vehicle of the day that reminds me of God's greatness.