



# Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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## April is National Poetry Month

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on APRIL 20, 2015

April is national poetry month in the U.S. Started in 1996, it is (according to my local library) “the largest literary celebration in the world with schools, publishers, libraries, booksellers, and poets celebrating poetry’s vital place in our culture.”

I want to celebrate poetry too with this week’s blog. I’ll begin by quoting a few lines from some of my favorite poems. And then I’ll say a few words about each poem. And finally I’ll conclude with two of my own poems.

## About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame, teacher, student, author, speaker, listener, friend, poet, farm girl.



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## About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I’ll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality– the everyday kind of spirituality that includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.





*The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.*

*In green pastures you let me graze;*



*to safe waters you lead me;*

*you restore my strength. (Ps. 23:1-2)*

These are the opening lines from Psalm 23, of course, a poem attributed to King David. It is surely one of the most beloved prayer-poem-songs in scripture. Throughout the centuries it has been prayed at weddings, at funerals, and often during very difficult

times. Most Christians find the central image of God as our shepherd immensely consoling...

\* \* \*

*Tell all the truth but tell it slant,*

*Success in circuit lies,*

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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*Too bright for our infirm delight*

*The truth's superb surprise.* (Emily Dickinson)

Truth can be blinding. Truth can be overwhelming. That's why we must approach it from the side sometimes and not head-on. "The truth must dazzle gradually," Emily says, or we will all "be blind." I love this poem—especially when I remember that GOD is TRUTH! At times God has to dazzle us gradually so as not to blind or overwhelm poor "infirm" us!

\* \* \*

One of my favorite poets is Mary Oliver. This is the couplet at the end of her poem, "The Summer Day":

*Tell me, what is it you plan to do*

*with your one wild and precious life?*

I've meditated on these lines many times. I love her word "one" which reminds me that I have only one life to live. Her word "wild" reminds me that I am not always in control of my life. "Wild" also denotes risk and maybe even exhilaration and fun. The word "precious" reminds me how lucky I am to have been given this life in the first place. And the phrase "plan to do" tells me that the choices I make definitely influence the kind of life I will have.

\* \* \*

## About the Sisters of Notre Dame, Chardon, Ohio

The Sisters of Notre Dame of Chardon, Ohio, belong to an international congregation of more than two thousand apostolic women religious. We are one in mind and one in heart for the transformation of the world in Christ.



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*After my third turtle died, I said:*

*"I'm through with turtles."*

*But I didn't mean it. (written by a child)*

Some anonymous little girl wrote this brief poem. For me it captures the essence of love: don't give up. And the essence of hope: don't be discouraged. Haven't we all experienced disappointments and deaths of all kinds? Hopefully we can (like this little poet) continue to go on loving turtles!

\* \* \*

Poet Brian Doyle has just published a marvelous book of poems entitled *A Shimmer of Something*. One poem is called "Poem for a Dear Friend." Here's the last line:

*There are more names for God than we'll ever know, and one is you.*

You can send that line to all your friends!

\* \* \*

And now here are a couple of my own poems. This first one, "Two Little Sparrows," is from my book *Just Because*). It celebrates spring, new life, and hope:

*Outside my bedroom window*

*on the roof of the porch*

*two little sparrows were doing it.*

*He had trouble with balance at first.*

*Luckily, she was the epitome of  
patience.*

*The whole affair lasted but a moment.*

*And when they were through,*

*I clapped.*

*Why?*

*Simply because two little sparrows*

*got together*

*to make more sparrows,*

*despite the toil of care,*



*potential storms,*

*droughts, cats,*

*and circling hawks everywhere.*

\*

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And finally, here's a poem called "The Road to God" from my book, *When the Blue Heron Flies*:

*The road to God is not long.*

*You need not cross the sea to find Divinity.*

*You need not trek across vast plains or barren deserts,*

*nor hack through dense jungles.*

*You need not scale jagged mountains jutting into the skies.*

*No, you have only to pause*

*and be still.*

*Then take that single step*

*into the deep center*

*of who you are.*

I hope you enjoyed these poems. Maybe you'll want to get a poetry book from the library to celebrate Poetry Month!

The song I chose for this week is "10,000 Reasons" by Matt Redman. This has become one of my favorite Christian songs:

*Do you have a favorite poem? Why do you like this particular poem?*

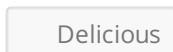
*Is poetry ever a part of your prayer?*

**PS:** Thank you to the Victory Noll Sisters in Huntington, IN for their warm hospitality

these past four days. I gave an Easter retreat to about 25 retired Sisters there and enjoyed my time with these beautiful and dedicated women—most of them in their 80's and 90's. And thank you, readers, for your prayers!

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**Kathleen Magiera** April 20, 2015 at 5:49 am



Thanks for the song Sr. Melannie. Good way to start the day.

I start my prayers everyday with a poem from free book of poems I got in a Trappist Monastery recently. Those set the tone for my day.

Kathleen

REPLY



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**Karen** April 20, 2015 at 9:28 am



I love the “turtles” poem. As a cat lover, I have loved and buried many, many kitties and have had this exact sentiment each time. “But of course I don’t mean it.”

I am a big fan of Haiku. Here’s one I wrote a long time ago:

Happy black dog bounds  
Thru untrammel’d snowy drifts  
Heedless of brilliance

Thank you Sr. Melannie. I so look forward to your Monday morning reflections.

REPLY

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**Joanne Bennardo** April 20, 2015 at 9:41 am



Good morning, Sister Melannie,

Thank you for your dedication to Sunflower Seeds. Today’s sampling of poems speaks to me, on one hand, of newness and hopefulness, and on the other, of loss and dangers. But our awareness of God, in the center of our being, is the constant sustenance that runs through all.

This is a beautiful reflection to begin my day and my week—a week in which my loving sister-in-law will be married, after spending forty years as a widow. May God bless her, her groom, and you.

Joanne

REPLY

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**Valerie Schneider** April 20, 2015 at 9:57 am



You chose one of my favorites of Emily Dickinson.

My favorite psalms are 27, 63, and 116.

When I was a teacher I loved April, Poetry Month. We put paper all through the halls so students could write poems, and we chalked them on the sidewalk.

Going to the library today—to get a book of poems.

REPLY

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**Maggie Dunn** April 20, 2015 at 9:59 am



I had not been much of a poetry person until I met Bishop Robert Morneau through “The Color of Gratitude” and other of his books.

It has been a joy to be gifted by “Spiritual Surprises”. 😊 And because of him, I have enjoyed today’s poetry!!! More spiritual surprises from you, Sister. Thank you for each Monday morning!!

Maggie Dunn

REPLY

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**Carolyn Shalhoub** April 20, 2015 at 10:12 am



Always just the right reflection and song for the day and week. I just discovered Mary Oliver a few years ago and have several of her books now. I heard the podcast of her interview with Krista Tippett of “On Being”. Sometimes technology is wonderful. I also love John O’Donoghue.

REPLY

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**roshini Poriyath** April 20, 2015 at 3:50 pm



Beautiful song to ponder . I love it.

REPLY

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**Cathy Baier** April 20, 2015 at 9:35 pm



I have always had a love of trees...they are majestic and moving... so a favorite poem is Trees by Joyce Kilmer. Some of the verses:

I think that I shall never see

A poem as lovely as a tree.....

A tree that looks at God all day

And lifts her leafy arms to pray;.....

Poems are made by fools like me,

But only God can make a tree.



REPLY

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**Barbara** April 21, 2015 at 8:46 am



I do love poetry, and Mary Oliver is one of my favorites, as well as William Blake. I am finding beautiful poetry in the bible, and my very favorite is from Job (12:7-10).

Now ask the beasts to teach you, and the birds of the air to tell you; or the reptiles on earth to instruct you, and the fish of the sea to inform you. Which of all these

does not know that the hand of God has done this? In His hand is the soul of every living thing and the life breath of all mankind.

REPLY

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**DeDe Kidder** April 26, 2015 at 8:26 am



Love "Sunflower Seeds" and all the poems and music in this issue. As someone said, it is a beautiful way to start a day and appreciate simple poetry and God's creation.

REPLY

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**JoAnn Haney, OSF** April 29, 2015 at 12:11 pm



Loved the song, my favorite is, Why I wake early by Mary Oliver plus Mindfulness. Thanks for the inspiration.

REPLY

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