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Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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The Need for Rituals

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on JUNE 3, 2012

As I drive the highways, I sometimes notice a small cross with flowers by the side of the road. The homemade “shrine” tells me, “Someone was killed here.” And I say a prayer for them. The need to mark these tragic deaths with the ritual of a little shrine seems to run deep in our human psyche.

A ritual is a set of actions and/or words performed mainly for their symbolic value. Often they have a religious connotation. Rituals are important because they satisfy a spiritual or emotional need. They can also strengthen the bonds among us.

But deaths along the highways are not the only events that naturally elicit rituals. Last weekend my niece Melannie (who is working on her Ph.D. in ecology at Colorado State University), told me this story. She had spent the previous week studying for her final written and oral exams. Before she left her house to take the exams, she felt she had to “do something.” On one of her shelves sat a picture of my parents (her grandparents). They had helped pay for her initial college graduation. Also on the shelf was the globe my parents had given her for Christmas when she was a little girl. Near the globe was an old book on gardening that my father, a lover of the outdoors, had given her a long time ago. Melannie gathered up the photo, the globe, and the gardening book and hugged them tightly as she asked her grandparents to help her with her exams. Knowing her grandparents’ influence on her education and field of study, Melannie turned to them at this significant juncture in her life. (PS. She passed all her exams!)

Before we sold my parents’ home a number of years ago, I performed this little ritual. I went to the empty house by myself. I walked slowly through every room, pausing to recall events that had occurred in each room and thanking God for all the blessings each room had witnessed. We can create rituals for all kinds of events: the manner in

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.

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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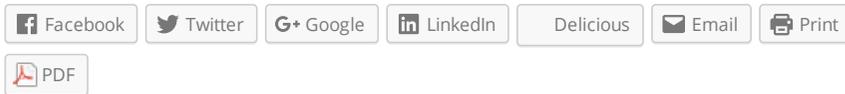
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which we celebrate birthdays or graduations, the traditions we establish for Christmas or Thanksgiving, the special activities we do with our friends, the way we relax with our family, the way we pray.

Our Catholic tradition is filled with rituals: The celebration of the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, our funeral traditions, the praying of the Divine Office, the rosary, and the sign of the cross, to name a few.

Do you have any favorite rituals—religious or otherwise? What do these rituals do for you spiritually or emotionally? Would you like to share any of these with us?

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Sr. Susan Wolf June 5, 2012 at 5:16 pm



One of the rituals I have takes place each year when I make my annual retreat on the grounds of our Provincial Center. I visit our community cemetery and I walk passed each head stone, remembering the sisters who have gone before me. Some I didn't really know, others were my teachers and mentors, classmates, close friends, women I lived and ministered with. As I walk and remember, I find myself smiling sometimes or shedding a tear. I thank God for the gift that each one was to this community, to the Church and to me. I find that this ritual gives me a wonderful sense of well being and deep gratitude for my vocation.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND June 6, 2012 at 10:25 am



Susan, thank you for sharing this beautiful ritual with us. I perform this ritual too when I'm on retreat at our provincial center. I was a first year novice when the first sister was buried in that cemetery in 1963. So the 385 sisters buried there today, represent my whole life as a sister!

REPLY

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pjnoga June 14, 2012 at 10:52 am



Thanks Melannie, for the sharing on rituals. Fr. Lenny once told me to Make a spiritual ritual when ever I leave a classroom I have taught in for A time. To stand in the stand in the classroom and thank the Lord for All the love of the children and the blessings they have bestowed on me and I on them. to think of the good experiences and the not so good Experiences. I have done that at several places I have left and it helps me to leave it in peace and with good feelings about it. In a few instances I have returned to that school with no regrets.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND June 19, 2012 at 12:16 pm



Dear PJ,

This is a beautiful practice. Thank you for sharing it with us!
Melannie

REPLY

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