



# Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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## Spirituality and Mountains

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on AUGUST 13, 2012

This week I'll be leading a retreat in Maggie Valley, North Carolina. Nestled in the heart of the Smoky Mountains, the retreat center (called Living Waters Catholic Reflection Center) is a lovely place for a retreat. (Check out their website: [catholicretreat.org](http://catholicretreat.org).) The place was the dream of Fr. William Murphy, a Detroit business man who became a priest at age 80! (His story proves you're never too old to hear a life-altering call from God!) Fr. Murphy converted a hotel into Living Waters retreat center hoping it would become a place for people to pray and "drink in the beauty of the mountains."

What is it about mountains that attract so many people? In my book, *When the Rain Speaks*, I have a chapter on mountains. In it I give a few interesting facts about mountains. Mountains cover 24% of the earth's surface and play a critical role in supporting life on the planet. More than half the world's population depend on mountains for their water.

The highest mountains are the Himalayas where the average mountain rises over 3 miles above sea level. The Andes in South America are the next highest mountains with an average height of 2.5 miles. But the Andes are much younger than the Himalayas and are growing significantly taller each year. Eventually the Andes will be taller than the Himalayas.

In ancient times mountains were associated with divinity. The Greeks, for example, believed Zeus and his divine cohorts resided on Mt. Olympus. In many religions, mountain tops were the place to encounter God. Moses trekked up Mt. Sinai to converse with God. Jesus was fond of mountains too. He frequently went into the mountains to pray. Being up high and viewing a vast panorama can take our break away. The sheer height and breadth of mountains have a way of humbling us lowly

## 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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human beings. Being speechless and feeling lowly are both good experiences for the soul.

Poets like Dante and John of the Cross saw mountains as images of the spiritual journey. They and other mystics compared the path to God to climbing a mountain.

So this week I will be in the mountains. I hope to see some wild life while I'm there. Last time I gave a retreat in Maggie Valley, I was privileged to see some elk. (They were re-introduced into the area by park authorities a few years back.) I was delighted to meet a male elk with his "wife" and child—on two different occasions. Both times we got close enough to read the number on his ear tag: 67. (I remember the number because it was the number I was given in the novitiate!)

In July I led a retreat beside the ocean at Cape May, NJ. Many of you supported that retreat with your prayers. Thank you! Now I am asking for your prayers again for this retreat in the mountains. In return, while in Maggie Valley, I promise to pray for all the readers of my blog—especially as I drink in the beauty of the Smoky Mountains.

What has been your experience of mountains? Do mountains speak to your spiritual life?

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**Shauna Bankemper** August 13, 2012 at 5:17 am



Hi, Melannie! I loved my retreat experience at Maggie Valley! It is truly "holy ground." You can count on my prayers for the retreat...it will be wonderful for the retreatants and the director. Enjoy the great Smokies! I envy the retreatants! Love, Shauna

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**Dion** August 13, 2012 at 7:56 am



Melannie,

Safe journeying there and while there and coming home. May you enjoy many theophanies with your retreatants. I will keep all in prayer.

Dion

REPLY

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**Chandra** August 13, 2012 at 10:58 am



Such an interesting post. I too like the mountains, but more from afar. They have such an awesome-ness about them. I enjoy visiting them, and seeing them, but I often feel claustrophobic when there. One of my favourite feelings is when we are driving out of the mountains and I get the first glimpse of the prairies, where I grew up and now live. I feel released, free, like I can breathe again! Perhaps I am just comforted by the familiarity. I love to be able to see forever, with no trees getting in the way!

Enjoy your treat - I will include you in my prayers.

REPLY

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**S. Pat Newhouse** August 13, 2012 at 3:27 pm



Melonie.

I've been to Maggie Valley for retreat twice. It's a beautiful, unforgettable place. I just returned from my month and a half stay at Mother Seton's Shrine in Emmitsburg, MD.

It was my 7th summer as a docent. What a wonderful experience. It's a beautiful, unforgettable place too.

You and your retreatants are in my prayers.

Love ya,

SPat

REPLY

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**Annie** August 13, 2012 at 4:16 pm



Dear Melannie,  
I will pray for you and the retreatants this week too. Say hi to NC for me!  
Love, Annie

REPLY

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**Helen Burdenski, SND** August 14, 2012 at 10:36 am



Hi Melannie,  
Hope you see lots of elk this week—even Mr. 67 and his family. Reflecting on mountains reminds me of an experience I had in January of this year. While on my Winter Sabbatical in Orange County, CA, I spent one Saturday climbing in the Santa Monica mountains with my niece Nora and her husband Jamie. The views were indeed breath-taking, but as we neared the top, I remember looking up at the steep ascent still to be climbed and thinking “There’s no way I’m going to be able to make it to the top.” Jamie quickly took the role of cheerleader, gave me two walking sticks and assured me that the path wasn’t as steep as it looked from below. Sure enough, we reached the top and were treated to a panoramic view of the Pacific, the downtown skyline, and the surrounding mountainside. Lesson learned: just take one step at a time and all the needed help will be there along life’s journey. You and the retreatants are in my daily prayer. Peace, love, and joy,  
Helen

REPLY

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**Ellen Svette Huntsman** August 14, 2012 at 11:16 pm



If I didn’t have other plans this week, I would drive up & visit! Hopefully we will meet next month.

I would love to go to Maggie Valley!!

Prayers for a wonderful retreat.

God be with you.

REPLY

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