

## How could anyone not...

Having left Mississippi, over eleven years ago, I still feel connected. Continuing to write my column for GulfPine Catholic, continues that bridge of connection. Hearing from readers and other friends still strengthen the ties. I always enjoy keeping up with events and happenings there, shared across the pond.

In August, I welcomed my most recent visitors. John and Sandra joined me for a week of visiting, dining on Irish cuisine and sightseeing.

It is always a joy to introduce my roots to others who bring their own perspective. I am always curious to listen to visitor's perspective on the sights and sounds that surround me daily. So often, one gets so accustomed to and takes for granted one's surroundings. Everything blends in with the landscape of ordinariness whereas, we need, from time to time, a different perspective of things and places seen for the first time through the prism of surprise and novelty.

During their week's visit, I took John and Sandra around my extended landscape. We drove a thousand miles to famous places and not so famous places; places yet to be explored and commercialized; places unknown to tourist or traveler, snaking our way through idyllic towns, villages and ever changing landscapes.

As we drove on roads that offered mountain lakes, cascading waterfalls, mountain paths that surprised us after every bend on the road, I sensed the awe and wonder of a couple seeing it for the first time.

"How could anyone not believe in God," Sandra said from her backseat advantage. I knew what she meant. Seeing nature at its finest, its raw beauty, untouched and unspoiled landscape; its majestic mountain peaks and nature's created winding narrow roads; one had to be in awe of the grandeur of God that was being showcased in front of us.

"How could anyone not believe in God" is a question that can only be heard through the eyes of faith. We all need new eyes, new ears and a new heart to see, hear, discover and appreciate the God within and without as He surrounds us.

Sandra shared a story about her cousin. Her cousin, while at college, continued her habit of attending Sunday Mass on campus. One weekend, she invited a young man that she had befriended to join her at Mass. He obliged. Time passed. Life continued. Some years later, that young man became a Catholic. Obviously, something stirred in his heart attending that first Mass that percolated and shaped his desire to become Catholic.

I am reminded of a passage in 1 Peter where, it says, "As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace. Whoever preaches, let it be with the words of God; whoever serves, let it be with the strength that God supplies." (1Peter 4:10f)

The grace to see the creativity of God, laid out in front of us on a tapestry of a life pulsating nature seeks to affirm our acknowledgment and affirmation of our response to, "how could anyone not..."

The "dappled things" of life and nature in particular remind us that we need to take off our shoes because we walk on hallowed ground. Gerald Manley Hopkins, captures St. Peter's challenge to accept and respond to the gift that God supplies; in his poem, "Pied Beauty.."

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;

And ál trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

Every morning, following breakfast, I journey on a walking trail. It gives be a chance to clear my head of any cluttered unprocessed thoughts. Without the distractions of the artificial world, I can embrace the dappled things that God wants me to experience; the young lambs shaking off the last vesteges of a night's slumber; an orchestra of different birds calling out to each other as they embrace a new day.; the

slow moving snails, complete with house, never in a hurry; the forest of tree saluting and flexing their muscles as they greet a new day; the horses greeting me with their distinctive neigh.

How can anyone not believe in God when they see His majesty towering around them in nature that is so pristine and powerful. How can anyone not believe in God when the graced moments of life, not only surprise us but also challenge us to action. Ho can anyone not believe in God when they see new life surfacing that reminds us that God still believes in us. How can anyone not believe in God who creates, recreates and constantly renews life's dappled things.