

Bounty in Emmitsburg

It was one of those beautiful days right after Easter. My friend - and mother of my cats- and I decided to make a pilgrimage to Emmitsburg.

We stopped first at the Seton Shrine. I didn't go into the Basilica, but I drove around to the back of the complex to the humble cemetery where so many Daughters of Charity have their final resting place. I always find it a moving experience to move among the crosses. Here humble servants of God are buried.

Someone has said of religious, "They lived anonymous lives and died anonymous deaths." They usually gave up family names for "religious" names - usually names of various saints. They gave their lives to God. How easy to say those words. What a gift to give.

Many of those deceased saints lived incredibly long lives. This might be a "selling point" for religious vocations: "Live a long life here and live forever in eternity!"

Yet even the longest life seems too short in comparison to eternity. If we are not living for God and for eternity, what are we living for?

From there we drove to Mount St. Mary's. In the distance was the golden statue of Mary. It felt nice to be "on pilgrimage," to be lost in the crowd instead of leading the crowd.

On that day I had what I can only call my own "apparition" of Mary. I positioned myself below the parking lot looking up at Mary's figure. From where I stood I could not see the base of the statue, only the "Golden Mary," gleaming in the sunlight, clouds blowing past her. It was a mystical moment. I stood transfixed.

I was reminded of Mary's visit to Nock, Ireland. She appeared but said nothing. A lifetime of devotion to Mary focused like a laser in that moment.

Then we moved on, up the trail past the Stations of the Cross and the Mysteries of the Rosary. We prayed at the Little Chapel, lit some candles for loved ones, and then sat next to the beautiful shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes.

In that moment, I felt what Bernadette experienced when Mary appeared to her in Lourdes. I felt caught up again in the moment, in the “Cathedral of the Forest” so to speak. Yes, of course, there was the statue of Mary. But the sounds of nature were so vivid – the glorious sunlight, plants and trees returning to bloom, the wind rustling the leaves, the sounds of water flowing and birds chirping. The bugs were not out yet. There were no distractions.

“God is in His heaven and all is well with the world” a poet wrote. In that moment, I felt the oneness of heaven and earth. All of creation was singing the glory of God. It was a Hymn of the Universe, worthy of St. Francis of Assisi or Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin.

Lest you think I was lost in mysticism, however, we then went to the Mountain Gate Restaurant. I always loved the restaurant – lots of wonderful food served in a “faith” setting by kind and helpful people. It’s a worthy conclusion to a day of prayer.

Life is filled with miracles. As Einstein said, “Either everything is a miracle or nothing is a miracle.” I believe life itself is the miracle – the miracle of existence. You and I got a chance at life.

And the secret of life is so simple. We are only unhappy when we focus on what we do not have. We are happy when we are grateful for what we do have.

Mary’s soul “glorified the Lord.” So can our souls!