

# Find extraordinary in the ordinary

I was only 9 years old in 1986 when Halley's Comet made its most recent appearance. I was determined to see it. My physicist father, who had built a telescope out of a PVC pipe and a couple lenses, was happy to encourage my interest in astronomy.

One early morning while it was still dark, he gently shook me awake. We drove to a rural part of northern Baltimore County where we could escape the city lights and see the comet before it traveled out of sight for another 75 years.

I had seen pictures of the comet, so I knew it was a magnificent celestial orb with a vibrant, flaming tail. I was excited to have the chance to see it myself that chilly winter night. When my father found the comet with his telescope, I saw that it was just a bright little streak in the sky.

What was truly amazing to my 9-year-old self wasn't that once-in-a-lifetime moment. Instead, I was in awe of the perfectly ordinary yet spectacular shooting star we saw go dancing across the darkness. And I couldn't get over how, as the first light of day crept into the sky, I heard a rooster crow. For a little girl growing up in a Rodgers Forge townhouse, nothing could top the magic of being that close to a rooster. Seeing Halley's Comet definitely paled in comparison.

I often think of that night, especially now that I am a parent. Sometimes I try to create a special experience for our children only to find that the greatest joy they encounter is some simple and peripheral aspect that we could have discovered anywhere.

I take our son to a festival to learn more about Asian-American culture, and he is ecstatic to find little brown spotted moths in the grass there. At Christmas I ask my 4-year-old niece what Santa brought her and she lights up and says, "A banana and a granola bar." We drive all the way to the beach and the children are sprinting to the table to eat Grandma's pulled pork – a dish she would happily cook for them at her home, which is 15 minutes from ours. You hand a toddler a gift, and she is more interested in the box than in what's inside.

It doesn't take an extraordinary event to capture a child's attention or spark his or her enthusiasm. Children have an innate sense of wonder. They can be awestruck over how a cement mixer rotates or how a fly can stand on a wall. They notice the shapes of clouds and trees, marvel at how a bunny darts into the bushes, and see how the snowflakes stick to the windows. They ask questions about everything, wanting to understand the world around them, and they take delight in both the usual and the unusual.

It's that childlike sense of wonder that God invites us to carry with us throughout our lives. We can encounter him in the awesome majesty of a mountaintop sunrise or a scrunched bouquet of dandelion's in a child's fist. We can find him in the splendor of the trumpets and choruses of Easter Sunday or in the quiet of a regular Thursday morning Mass. We can seek him even in the smallest, seemingly inconsequential moments.

"I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that wherever you go, the least plant may bring you clear remembrance of the Creator," St. Basil said. "A single plant, a blade of grass or one speck of dust is sufficient to occupy all your intelligence in beholding the art with which it has been made."

In this time between Christmas and Lent, we mark Ordinary Time. We won't find the milestone celebrations of Christmas and Easter, and we aren't in the reflective seasons of preparation of Advent and Lent. Instead, we have the chance to see Jesus as both divine and human. We can see the friendships he made, marvel at the miracles he performed, and learn how he taught us to live and love. We have the chance to find the extraordinary in the ordinary.

And, as we try to recapture a childlike sense of wonder, maybe we'll even discover something new about ourselves – and our relationship with God.