

God's kingdom is all around us

By Father Joseph Breighner

One of my favorite parts of summer is the appearance of fireflies - what we as kids always called lightning bugs.

For many years, my first sighting of lightning bugs would come while I was giving a retreat for the separated and the divorced over the Memorial Day Weekend at the Jesuit Retreat House in Faulkner in Charles County. I would drive the mile-long road at night to where the field met the woods. There I would be awestruck by a veritable galaxy of lighting bugs! I had never been able to duplicate this experience anywhere else.

Then, on a Saturday night in the middle of June, as I was listening to voice mails (I also have a galaxy of messages each day) I heard the sound of a cat meowing. I was dumbstruck. I thought perhaps a cat was lost or in distress. So, I put my shoes back on, and went out into the dark behind the rectory. I found no cat, but, to my astonishment, there in the night was another galaxy of lightning bugs.

I was reminded of a true story about a South African farmer. Diamonds had recently been discovered there, and he wanted to make his fortune. So he sold his farm and used the proceeds to finance his personal search for diamonds. He never found any.

The person who bought his farm, however, was down by the creek one day, and noticed something shiny in the water. He reached down and picked up one of the largest diamonds ever discovered. The original owner had spent his life looking somewhere else for treasure. He didn't know that diamonds were in his own backyard.

Yes, I look forward to going back to the retreat house in the future. I encourage you to consider a retreat there as well. If you like to travel, I encourage you to enjoy your

travel. I had to rediscover what I already knew.

Miracles are not somewhere else. Miracles are all around us, if only we have eyes to see. Yes, we can go to the Holy Land as I have, but, more importantly, we need to remember that every land is holy. There is nowhere that God is not. Evil has been defined as the lack of good. In other words, we have to work to rid ourselves or a place of the presence of God. Our land is naturally holy. So are we. We only have to wake up and see what Jesus told us, and that is the kingdom of God is within us – and that same kingdom is all around us.

When we quiet our minds, when we go into the stillness, we discover the presence of God.

But since we don't always do that, we need churches, temples and houses of worship. We need holy places to remind ourselves that all the world is holy. We need the sacraments, explicit channels of God's grace, so that we can see that all of creation is "charged with the grandeur of God."

Oh, in case you are curious, I never did find a cat. But some cats I have known and loved have gone to God over the years. I think it was one of them inviting me to see life again with childlike simplicity. Cats and a few dogs have always helped me to do that.

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