

Praying contemplatively

“The eyes are the window to the soul.” The thought can be traced back to poet Cicero who wrote before Christ. For me, windows are a kind of eyes for my spiritual life.

I often am up before the sun, and as I wander from razor to orange juice to toothbrush, I peer out the windows in my house often stopping by one or more of them watching the sun illuminate another day. It may be true that Cicero and others could understand one’s soul through their eyes ... but for me, windows are my way of grasping and understanding the holiness of each day.

Recently I sat in my dining room, doing some work in the afternoon. From my seat, I could see seven windows, each with a different view of the snow falling outside. All the way on my right, two windows showed the snow sticking to the bare wood branches of the viburnum and all the way to my left, two windows looked out far across the neighborhood to snow whitened pines a half mile away. A little to my right another window showed me my vegetable garden, quietly sleeping beneath a white blanket, while a little to my left the wind chimes gave me perfect notes eerily echoing in the cold, cold air. And directly in front of me tall cedars looking quite formal at the end of the field majestically sway in the wind with white tips on their branches.

But my windows don’t always have a single theme like snow and I have more than seven windows. Neighbors put mail out and walk their dogs. Children run to meet school busses. Trash trucks collect the garbage while birds and deer and ground hogs and the fox dart in and out of my gardens.

Each window is a view, with a frame and an opportunity to find the holy in that scene. Each window gives me a glimpse into another perspective, without being intrusive. Each perspective is yet another way to discover that God is most certainly present – from every view.

I think a window is a great tool for contemplative prayer. The glass gives me distance and insulation from the scene or moment, maybe even provides protection.

The view gives me an opportunity to focus on a particular perspective. Sometimes it is a perspective that I hadn't first considered. And of course many windows mean many perspectives. The frame asks me to step back, evaluate and put things in perspective. The vista is a reminder to me that I can never see it all, understand it all, wrap my arms around it all, taste it all, engage it all.

For me, every window is an opportunity for a prayer moment. The window sill is an altar on which we find the wonder and awe of creation captured in a digestible frame. Each frame is a work of art and a puzzle at the same time. The beauty of our human world displayed for us as we try to look past the apparent to find the ever present God in our midst. Do I see God in this view? Is this what God sees? What is God's plan for this moment, this day, this scene, these people? Are the people in my window view even aware that they are not alone ... but that God surrounds them and loves them?

From the window at my favorite coffee shop I can see people hurrying past the theater. The glass insulates me from their daily drama but I imagine their day and whisper a prayer in their name. From my old office window, I could see people scurry into the Basilica for the 12:10 Mass. They have no idea that I am watching from my window five floors up nor that their actions trigger in me a reflection on 2000 years of "do this in memory of me". From the window of my brother's house, I see babies in strollers jockeying with runners and bikers for a narrow path along a busy road. I reflect on life as an intersection of people traveling at different speeds and the dangers of such a confluence.

A window is a machine that takes my soul on a pilgrimage to a holy place that is sometimes 10,000 thoughts away from the place where I stand. A window is a portal for a journey for my soul to visit and remember all the many places where God's grace is active and busy and charged with life. To reflect on God in our midst is prayer of a most serious nature. To find God in our midst is a grace that rejuvenates joy and hope in the hearts of all people.

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