

# *Blessings All Around Us*

*Savoring God's Gifts*

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Foreword by Bishop Robert Morneau

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## Introduction

This is a book about the many dimensions of blessedness, the ways in which God's care touches and embraces us as we — ordinary people — make our way through life. The format is simple: a collection of short, reflective essays that invite the reader to pause and take note of *his or her* own blessings.

Long ago a wise monk advised me to incorporate some quiet, reflective time into each day when I would review the day's graces and the lapses from grace. In that way, he said, I would be in touch with the richness of my own life — the gifts of God — and the prodding of the Spirit to put faith into action. Without the reflective pause, he cautioned, it would be more difficult to grow in consciousness about God's hopes for me — and for the world — and whether or not I was helping or hindering their realization.

Daily pauses at first may seem impossible, although the most difficult part is simply to begin. However, an alternative method may be in order. Regular, focused, prayerful reflection, perhaps weekly (or even monthly), can certainly chart the way to a deeper awareness of God's blessed largesse. The goal is to become more attentive to our own experience wherein signs of God abound. *Blessings All Around Us* is conceived as a resource for doing that.

The essays are organized into four sections. The first is *The Presence of God*, which is about prayer, meditation, and the cultivation of our interior landscapes. This is followed by a section on *Ordinary Time and Holidays* where the presence of God in the company of others — community — is the subject for reflection. Section three is devoted to another aspect of community, what Catholic Christians refer to as *The Communion of Saints*, namely those who have gone before us into the full blessedness of life eternal. The saints offer us inspiration and practical guidance on how to live faithfully in the Holy Spirit. I have enlarged the scope of this term to include those other blessed beings we call angels, and the unnamed saints whom we celebrate on the feast of All Saints, November 1st. The fourth and final section, *The Challenge of Change* focuses on contemporary issues which require attentive, intelligent, and responsible decisions. All of us are faced with the application of what we have learned, from Church teaching and from our own explorations into the spiritual life, to the large and small issues and concerns that arise in our families, our parishes, our neighborhoods and in the larger society. The American bishops pointed out in *Called and Gifted for the Third Millennium* “while spirituality is more and more an explicit aspect of Christian life, ‘spiritual sight’ or insight is not sufficient in itself. The call to holiness requires effort and commitment to live the beatitudes.”

Much of what I have learned about the bounty of God has come from the stories that men and women in all walks of life, from all parts of the world, have shared with me. In addition to my suggestions for *Ways to Ponder Your Blessings*, I invite you the reader to pause, listen to the

inner word, remember the past, and imagine the future — and create your own reflective essays. You may prefer to “speak” your reflections, perhaps shared in your small faith communities, or to write them out. Whatever the form, I would appreciate learning about the blessings in your life. You may write me in care of Resurrection Press.



## Recognizing God's Presence

Winter was in the air at Holy Cross Abbey in Virginia when I began a weekend retreat there. Bare trees stood like sketches against the sky. The colors of winter filled the hillsides: burnt orange, a kind of gray rose, wisps of purple, bits of red berries here and there. A crisp slice of moon hinted at ice and snow. Silence was in the air.

Sometimes, it seems to me, a person needs to step back from the flow of ordinary life to see the treasures embedded in the rhythm of the days and nights. A retreat can provide such a respite — enabling one to see with fresh vision what always is present in life.

Retreats at Holy Cross, a Trappist abbey with a guest house, are simple and largely unstructured. During the course of several days one may attend the monks' chanting of the Divine Office and be present at Eucharist. Meals are taken in common with the other retreatants, but silently. The guestmaster may read or play music. Brother Steven chose to read from Loren Eiseley's *The Immense*

*Journey*, my husband's favorite book. Brother Steven considers Eiseley an example of a non-explicitly religious person who searched unceasingly for the face of God. Eiseley poked around in winter fields no longer lush with greenery, and studied buried roots and dying vegetation for clues to life's ultimate meaning.

As our weekend at Holy Cross unfolded I began to notice what I so often miss, and why. Hurry is one reason. The abbey's pace is totally unhurried. Everything in the monks' public life is done slowly and deliberately. The prayers are said aloud in half-note time, with the effect that each word has an appropriate gravity. Each word holds steady, echoes; each is "the word."

The first morning I thought about how much I needed to slow down and recognize, finally, that one of my defenses against God, against coming "near to the Face" (to use Brother Steven's phrase), is to be very busy, piling up deeds to accomplish, erecting a huge barricade. I saw that in the hurry, I miss the subtleties and details of life.

Crowded space is another block for me in seeing the details of my life — and finding God in them. The retreat, on the other hand, was an experience of spaciousness. The retreatants' rooms are ample; windows look out onto the spacious Virginia countryside.

The chapel, too, has an air of openness, yet everything and everyone seems well placed. The people are not overly separated from the monks, but separated enough. Visually speaking, we were part of the prayer, which in this space is to feel as if one is at the window looking out and looking in at the same time. Everything serves as a sign of God.

The silence of the monastery and of the retreat itself