

Seeing God in Unexpected Places

I see God
EVERYWHERE!



Christopher News Notes

HAVE YOU EVER TRIED ON A PAIR OF EYEGASSES and had them make everything look blurry? That's because the prescription wasn't right for your particular vision. Our perception of the world can also be blurry at times. We go through periods when life is hard, and God seems distant or even absent. But if we make a concerted effort to view the people and circumstances that surround us through the lens of faith, we may discover God in unexpected places.

Seeing God in Prison

Catholic singer-songwriter Sarah Hart was performing a concert at a parish in Mansfield, Ohio, so the event's organizers invited her to take part in their prison ministry program. Having never played in a prison before, she agreed to lead the music for a Mass for the inmates.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Sarah reflected, "I've sung at 3,000 Masses in my life...[but this] was the most beautiful Mass I've ever been privileged to be a part of. The men sang with such gusto, they had a choir, they had instruments. Afterwards, we were all able to talk...Some of them told me why they were there. We talked about music, they talked about their struggles... I was so moved by them. A lot of times, I think, when we as Christians go into charitable situations, we think, 'I can't wait to bring Jesus to these people.' But I'm here to tell you, those guys know Jesus better than I do. They brought Jesus to me that day."

Sarah was so moved by the experience that she wrote a song about it, titled "As You Are." She explained, "There's so many people in this world who feel on the outside of church...who feel excluded and outcast. Here comes Jesus...speaking to us, 'Come just as you are...There's not a thing you can give Me except your heart.' There's no more beautiful concept than that, and no better news than that. I wanted to write a song to thank [the prisoners] for opening my eyes to that...It allowed me to hear the voice of God saying, 'You see, Sarah, nobody is excluded. My desire is that all come to Me.'"

Seeing God in Those with Disabilities

Delaney Coyne's background is in academic theology, and she admits that she loves reading about God. She also acknowledges that faith needs to be more than simply getting information from books. The person who has most helped Delaney see Jesus's presence in this world is her younger sister, Charlotte, who has an intellectual disability. As they were growing up together, Delaney witnessed

Seeing God in Little Acts of Love

Dominican Sister Ave Clark has spent more than 60 years in religious life, helping others deal with their struggles through her Heart to Heart Ministry program. She has learned to see God's presence in all different kinds of people and situations, and takes special inspiration from the words of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who said in her Magnificat, "My soul magnifies the Lord."

Sister Ave notes that we don't have to magnify the Lord in large ways. It can happen through the smallest acts of love. "I look across the street every day," Sister Ave said during a *Christopher Closeup* interview, "and I see a man put his special [needs] son, who is nonverbal, on this bus...He's back out there at 3:15 waiting for his son. And when the bus pulls up, I see them. The son gets off, gives his father the bag, reaches out his arms, and they hug each other. The father will not change the son's mental capacities or his emotional life, but what I see is love. That's what I see through Mary. Each one of us can magnify...Mary's loving 'Yes,' her loving trust, her loving humanity...That's where our Magnificat happens in our ordinary life."

the challenges and victories that Charlotte experienced when it came to learning and practicing her Catholic faith.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, she said, "Charlotte reminds me that there's something a lot deeper to faith than just knowledge...She engages with the faith in a different way than I do. She's often a much better Christian than I am. She sees the good in everyone. She shows love to everyone, and she's open to love. It reminds me to break from my own rigidity and see the mystery of God's abundant love. So, my image of faith and image of the Church is bound up in my relationship with my sister. I came to know God through going to church with my family and sitting next to her, and I learned who God is and what love is. It reminded me that there's this real power of unity in diversity."

Delaney set out to explore the state of disability ministries in the Church today in order to write about it for *America*. She found a moving example at St. Therese of Lisieux Church in Cresskill, New Jersey. Its pastor, Father Samuel Citero, O.Carm., was inspired by a trip he took to Lourdes in 2015. After seeing the community and fellowship that people with disabilities experienced there, he suggested starting Masses in a similar style at St. Therese. Parishioners loved the idea and quickly

got things going.

As a result, St. Therese celebrates a monthly special needs Mass that welcomes both those with disabilities, as well as the wider parish community. People with disabilities serve in all parts of the Mass, from altar servers to lectors to the choir. When she attended one of these special needs Masses, Delaney found herself deeply touched by its life-affirming and faith-affirming spirit. Jesus's presence was indeed made visible in the worship and celebration of a group of people who were overlooked no more.

Seeing God in Our Elders

Actress Annie Lees took a job entertaining fans between innings for Minor League Baseball's St. Paul Saints in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One day, she began talking to an older man in a nearby seat. She could tell he had memory issues, so she chatted with him for an hour, reported Katy Read in *The Minnesota Star Tribune*. Lees recalled, "After the game his daughter comes up to me. And she was emotional. And she said...'My dad has Alzheimer's, and for you to stand there and talk to him was so amazing. Don't ever stop doing what you're doing.'"

Months later, Lees was working another Saints game when the same man's daughter approached

her. The daughter said, "I'm so happy to see that you're still doing this. My father has since passed on, but we will never forget what you gave to him that day." That comment set Lees on a new path.

Earlier in her life, she had developed an addiction to alcohol and drugs. She finally got help after realizing that God had a better plan for her life that she wanted to discover. Following the incident with the man with Alzheimer's, Lees mentioned it to her pastor, who asked her if she'd ever thought about going into ministry. Since Lees loved listening to people share stories about their lives, she found herself drawn to becoming a chaplain.

Lees is now the chaplain at Catholic Eldercare, a local facility that houses seniors with dementia and other medical issues. She sees God's presence in the people she serves, noting, "It's a...particular time in people's lives. They're coming to the end of things...I think what's so beautiful about it is honoring them and helping walk them home... Our job is to walk each other home. And if we can do that for one another in some small way, every day, whatever it is, I think that's what this life is all about."

Seeing God in Times of Pain

In the early 2000s, when he was serving as Director of the Society of the Little Flower, Father Bob Colaresi, O. Carm., began enduring serious pain in his lower back. Doctors learned that an

infection was "eating away" at his spinal cord, so he required immediate surgery to keep from being crippled for life. Recalling this incident in the newsletter *Between Friends*, Father Bob wrote, "It was like a miracle. But I was still bedridden for a long time and impatient...Because I do not suffer well, I did not pray well. I was frustrated and felt God and everyone had abandoned me."

Eventually, Father Bob cried out in prayer to St. Thérèse, who had also suffered greatly in her life, asking how she continued to believe in God's love and mercy in her darkest hours. Father Bob then heard a whisper telling him, "Trust God!" That answer just made him angry.

Two weeks later, he asked the same question and got the same answer: "Trust God!" This time, he experienced an epiphany. In his slow and painful recovery, Father Bob had asked for physical healing. But St. Thérèse gave him a spiritual awakening instead (though the physical healing eventually came as well). Father Bob came to realize that he had felt "inadequate" most of his life because of messages he got from his family as a young man.

"I spent my life trying to prove I have value and was competent. I became messianic in my own eyes...I was running over people to make things happen and prove myself...The healing St. Thérèse helped me to experience was that I wasn't the Messiah – God was still in charge!...While it was humbling to learn that, it was freeing and healing. I had to trust God and trust the people God sent into my life...It was not the healing I was looking for, but the healing I needed to live a more faithful and generative life."

There is a line in a prayer to St. Thérèse which reads, "Give me your childlike faith to see the face of God in the people and experiences of my life, and to love God with full confidence." Perhaps we should all utter that prayer every day, asking for the grace to see with clearer vision that God is indeed around us in more ways than we expected.


**"It's better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness."**

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*"The fullness of joy is to behold God in
everything."*

—Julian of Norwich