

Discovering the Holy in the Unexpected

BY ANN ZIVOTSKY



Planning a first visit to Manhattan, visions of going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Broadway came to mind. On a visit to the Met, with its beautiful art, seeing the massive “Washington Crossing the Delaware” filling most of the wall, was impressive. Going to a Broadway show, I discovered this California native, so used to driving a car to get anywhere, wasn’t ready to walk into traffic to hail a taxi. I’m still grateful to the women who offered to share a cab with me.

I was in Manhattan when I realized how overwhelmed I was by the crowds of people. It was tiring to walk among hundreds of people, to try to find the way to places when I didn’t know where I was going, and to be bombarded by the constant noise of the city. At one point I looked across the street and saw the magnificent spires of St. Patrick’s Cathedral. My soul craved the quietness of a church on a Saturday morning. Sitting in a pew of the Gothic cathedral, seeing all the beautiful stained glass windows, and feeling the presence of God was a salve to my harried spirit. It was an unexpected moment to connect with God.

I experienced another unexpected connection to God during this pandemic. I have an underlying medical condition and was angry a few months ago at the protesters wanting to reopen, in my belief, too soon. I asked Mother Brenda how to not be angry at the protestors who, I felt, were thinking of me and others as expendable. She found a prayer from the St. Augustine’s Prayer Book; it asks for the gifts of the Holy Spirit to, among other things, love our neighbor, find the peace that Jesus promises, and for kindness that reflects God’s mercy.

I ordered a copy of the prayer book and read through it one afternoon when I was feeling defeated about being alone and cut off from the things that were helping me deal with grief with my husband’s death. I couldn’t have lunch with friends, take the Eucharist, or visit the Safari Park and see my beloved tigers.

Originally published in 1947 by an Anglican monastic community, the Order of the Holy Cross, the small book is filled, yes, with prayers, but I found much more to help me on my spiritual journey. An exploration of the seasons of the church, with saint and feast days, gives a sense of the ebb and flow of the church year. There’s a list of the Ten Commandments—for those of us who don’t have them memorized—the virtues, the seven deadly sins for self-examination, and a reminder of the gifts of the Holy Spirit from Scripture.

And for those busiest days, when stopping for prayer seems too difficult, I found this simple prayer:

***I praise God this day.
I give myself to God this day.
I ask God to help me on this day.***