

“I look up at the blue sky and the bare chestnut tree, on whose branches little raindrops shine, appearing like silver, and at the seagull and other birds as they glide on the wind. As long as this exists... and I may live to see it, this sunshine, these cloudless skies, while this lasts, I cannot be unhappy.”-Anne Frank

Now and then, during my afternoon walks, I take my phone camera out and snap beauties, here and there, whatever catches my attention, wherever I lay my eyes. Since the beginning of the pandemic, my supposed physical exercise of accomplishing 10,000 steps a day has become more and more a leisure time of encountering beauty, keeping in touch with the **now-ness** of life. No doubt, the world's suffering seems to be unbearable and overwhelming. The life that we knew before no longer exists. It seems to have become a thing of the past. It is sometimes tempting to not pay attention anymore and be numb emotionally and psychologically. It is so easy just to raise our hands, give up and say, *“That’s it. I am done with all of this crap!”* But then again, what would happen if we surrendered and gave in to depression, isolation, and loneliness? What good does it do? What would that make of us?

My afternoon walk has become a lifesaver for me. Not only does it oxygenate my brain (which helps me relax and stay calm), but it also wells up my heart and spirit in gratitude and love for life! As Anne Frank said, “as long as the seagull and other birds glide on the wind and little raindrops shine, appearing like silver on the branches, while this lasts, I cannot be unhappy!” Mother nature is God’s way of



letting us know that it is not all bad. Happiness is a choice. The Earth, our home, is holding us all. She continuously embraces us every time we take notice of the tiny, yellow daffodils. Or whenever we exchange smiles with our fellow human beings, inhale the freshness of the morning light, or even have the opportunity to rest our mind and our bodies at the end of the day to sleep. Sometimes we get caught up in our heads and thoughts, and we tend to believe

that this is all there is. Yes, I agree; sometimes, it does feel that way.

And it is normal. The loving Creator made us, though, in such a way that we can enjoy the gift of creation. We have the various senses in our bodies for us not just to function like robots but to truly live fully!

I guess happiness can be very relative and subjective, for that matter. I am biased when it comes to spending time outdoors and perhaps privileged to live in one of the world's most gorgeous cities, San Francisco, California. Part of why I love nature a lot has to do with growing up poor and living my childhood years in Manila, where what we mostly saw were jeepneys, basketball courts, and buildings. My family always had either a cat or a dog, which I can say is the closest thing I had to nature (of course, other than the other human beings I lived with). In the



summer, sometimes, we went to the beach together and had a picnic. I remember swimming into the open sea and forgetting everything; it was simply a mesmerizing childhood experience. Now that I am an adult, the memory seems to have the same effect on me still.

As a Sister of Social Service who ministers to children and families in a childcare setting and as a spiritual director, I give a lot of myself. It is the nature of who we are as ministers of God. We offer our best in everything that we do. Therefore, it is essential that we also take care of ourselves. How do we replenish our souls? We can only give from whatever reserves that we have. And I do that through

my walks and hikes. It is for free! Although it takes discipline and intentionality, it is hard not to be happy if my soul is tethered to the very thread that connects us all as one human and sentient family, which is the essence of God in everything and all things.

The whole thing is grace. Everything of the Universe-everything that has brought forth the carbon in my body, my body itself, the trees that are shining outside my window, the bees that are flying around collecting pollen-it's all grace if we recognize it. It's there for us.

-Sister Miriam MacGillis