

Nothing is owed to us in life, writes Christopher Bobin, not even the innocence of a blue sky. Great art is the art of thankfulness for the abundance of every moment.

Mary Karr asked fellow poet Thomas Lux if he ever prayed. Each had struggled with alcohol addiction, each had a son about a year old. Lux was barbecuing by a swimming pool for a gaggle of poets (Allen Grossman was there in a three-piece suit and watch fob).

Mary swirled her naked son around the pool while Lux, in his Speedo, turned sausages and chicken with one of those diabolical-looking forks. Mary asked *Do you pray? I say thanks* came the response. *For what? Say thanks for the sky,* Lux said, *say it to the floorboards. This isn't hard, Mare.*

But how can one be thankful in the face of so much evil in the world. What kind of a god would allow such horror? To learn which questions are unanswerable, and not to answer them, to relax and accept what is impossible to comprehend, is a skill most needful in times of stress and darkness. It is the difference between rage and exhaustion and, contrary to popular opinion, the possibility of peace and hope.

No one ever had an odder guru than the uber-ironic Thomas Lux, but Mary started following his advice by mouthing rote thank-you's into the air, and, right off, she discovered something. There was an entire aspect of her life she had been blind to—the small, good things that came in abundance.

Suddenly, the world view to which I'd clung so desperately as realistic—we die, worms eat us, there is no God—was not so much realistic as the focal expression of my own grief-sodden inwardness. Like Hawthorne's reverend in The Minister's Black Veil, I could only interpret the world through some form of grief or self-absorbed fear.

Our reading from Ephesians (1:15-23) is a single sentence in the Greek text, a prayer. Before Paul prays that God give the Ephesians a spirit of wisdom and revelation so the eyes of their hearts may be enlightened, he gives thanks for their faith and love. Before asking for something more, he begins with gratitude for what is.

It is easy to become preoccupied with what is lacking, with who is missing. Gratitude, as Mary Karr learned, is a learned skill. Learning to give thanks for the abundance of every moment in this life where everything is given to us, every instant, sunshine and rain, strength and pain, makes us more alert to God's involvement in our lives.

There is only one sadness you might encounter: how to receive life and yet not darken it with the feeling that something is owed you (Christopher Bobin). Gratitude grants us a higher perspective, where we see many more choices.

An early “wound” of rejection meant that Denise Levertov spent a lifetime attempting to understand and discover remedy for this hurt, to find intimate communion. She writes:

In each mind, even the most candid,
 there are forests, . . .

 In these forests there live certain events, shards
 of memory, scraps of once-heard lore, intimations
 once familiar—some painful, shameful, some
 drably or laughably inconsequent, . . .

There they dwell, . . .
 . . .these forests; privacies
 and the deep terrain to receive them.
 Right they rise at times into our [range of vision]
 and are acknowledged.

Acknowledgement of the wound propelled her to pay attention to what was around her, to shift her focus from the wound within to the world without, and as she did so, wonder arose and ultimately gratitude.

In her own words: More and more strongly as the years have passed, and despite whatever grief and losses those years brought to my private life, despite, too, my constant and often intense awareness of the tensions, disasters, cruelties and overwhelming threats in the world, I experienced a welling up of gratitude for life itself and for the many extraordinary blessings of my own history.

To what, to whom? Gratitude implies an object; and not merely an impersonal force but a giver having the option of not giving. A belief in blind chance, in luck, does not give rise to the sensation of gratitude as I experience it. Awe and gratitude healed a grief-sodden inwardness; awe and gratitude opened the door to faith and love.

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