

Mindful Living: Prayer in Motion on the Kankamangus Highway

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Down in the little pocket between the seats in my gold Saturn I've stuck a Post-It note that has "Pray" written on it. This little stickie is a reminder for me to stay in touch with God; I need the reminder because I get distracted with all the things on all my other lists. Even with the reminder, I still sometimes feel awkward, maybe a bit artificial when I recite prayers. It reminds me of Janice Joplin's tongue-in-cheek lyrics from her song *Mercedes Benz*: "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz? My friends all drive Porsches, I must make amends. Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends, So Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz?"

There's that, and then there's the fact that some time ago I started saying to people who seemed to need it: "I'll keep you in my prayers." Sometimes I worry about that because it's not like I'm kneeling by the bed each night like those velvet paintings with the precious child performing the Lord's Prayer; that plus making sure I checked my list twice to include whoever it was that I promised I would this week or last. I guess I just don't pray in that organized sort of way. Instead, I started sending my prayers up in the "just in time" method, as we say where I work. But in truth, even with that I've often wondered if semi-random thoughts sent up to God, even just just-in-time sent thoughts actually constituted a prayer, or if they came in under the wire only as a gentle reminder.



Another way I've approached this prayer thing is by counting my blessings, something which is so often touted as a goodly endeavor that it's become trite. Even when I do succumb to goodness, I feel like I'm inhabiting a Hallmark card. But then last week my friend Karen gave me this little cork-stopped jar filled with a dozen colored glass stars. The directions suggest that you think of something wonderful in your life – twelve things in fact – as you count through the stars. I kind of like that because there's a definable goal, and of course the stars tinkle nicely against one another. It's pretty easy to look around and see twelve blessings; real easy in fact and it certainly does lighten the spirit. I've read that this kind of ritualistic appreciation has been shown to help people feel more in touch with God, as well as feel less depressed.



But then something happened the other day as I was driving off for a few days vacation, that struck me as what I might call prayer in motion. More than thoughts; more than just-in-time prayers; and more than attending to the humanity around me via colored chunks of glass. I was driving along the Kankamangus highway which is this 50 miles-per-hour roadway winding across New Hampshire. A river flows by to one side, and occasionally there are areas filled with rocks big enough that you might lay out on them like a happy lizard in the sun.

So, I'm cruising along and there's this beautiful gold Harley in front of me; one of those giant touring bikes with lots of big strapping bags all over it. It looked like one of those pack donkeys – but a lot more hip. In a second over a minute the rider slipped off the edge of the road into an exceedingly soft dirt valley dipping down a few feet right off the highway. In the motorcycle went and right on top of the rider and I had barely a moment to pull up behind and get my hazard lights on, even as another car to my left was pulling over too. The other driver rushed in and lifted the motorcycle up, while the guy somehow crawled out and lay flat on his back right there on the pavement, thankfully protected by my car a few yards off.



As a number of us rushed to his aid in various ways, we realized that he was mostly okay except for perhaps his hip, although he was clearly disoriented and in pain. Being out in the wild pines of New Hampshire, there was no cell phone service, so someone was dispatched to the next town for an ambulance. In the meantime I played traffic cop and kept the long line of do-gooders at bay; many of them genuinely wanted to help. Eventually, everything was under control and I went on. I told the gentleman that I'd pray for him, which I did as left; a bit disoriented myself if truth be told.

As I headed down the road, once again facing miles of pine trees, I realized something else, which perhaps explained my own disorientation. One was that while I had been of essential service in stopping immediately and using my car to protect the scene of the accident, I had not shared my gift of compassion, which was the one thing no one had offered this man, a man who was clearly in pain, shook up, and likely pretty scared too. Yes they took care of his immediate physical needs, but as he sat against a tree, apparently calm as he waited for the ambulance, I watched four people just standing about; even looking a bit uncomfortable I think. I wanted to kneel in front of him and ask him if he wanted to pray with me. And even if he couldn't pray *with* me, I might have taken his hand anyway, closed my eyes and directed some of God's healing power to him. But I didn't do that, and I lost my opportunity. I lost it because I was a little intimidated by those strangers, and then there was the fact that I was more of an onlooker than actually participating in rescuing this man, although I could also have done that too as I had Emergency Medical Technician training some years ago.

I regret this especially because it seems that in so many situations from day to day, it almost seems like I'm the only person who is aware of the spiritual needs of the people around me. Or at least I'm the only one who's willing to attend to them anyhow. I cannot quite say why this is so, because oddly enough most people think of me as a bit detached. But I do find myself called to address these delicate situations quite often. Circumstances of this nature seem to scare people, but somehow less so for me. I regret that I couldn't share love and faith with the guy on the motorcycle, and I like to imagine that he felt it anyway. Even more importantly, I came to realize that the entire situation was an example of prayer in motion, that all of us, two cars and another motorcycle immediately stopped and came to his aid; that another car with a medical professional passing by also stopped immediately to offer help. That he slid off the road, but it was to a deep soft bank of dirt which in fact was the most gentle landing, a very lucky thing. Had it been pavement – which it was just a few yards later – the circumstances would have been entirely different. That each of us knew precisely what to do and got out of each other's way.

If I could, I would dispense with the whispered prayers, and not make any more promises about keeping them either. I'd dispense with the beautiful colored glass stars each morning. I'd rather live a prayer in motion each day and know it. And no, I don't mean a motorcycle accident either, but rather something where I get to see the intersection of God and people and prayer. Now that would be worth all twelve colored glass stars in blessings from God.

REFERENCES

Appreciation and gratitude are essential to our personal growth and progress toward inner, family and global peace. Expand the gratitude in your world by expressing it with these 12 stars! Just give thanks for a gift in your life as you drop a star in the pot. Use your 'Thank your lucky stars' in your daily practice, at the dinner table, or to begin and end a meeting
<http://www.voiceofclay.com/%7Egumbyman/proddetail.php?prod=044>

Joplin, Janis (Last updated June 16, 2008). Mercedes Benz (song). Retrieved July 5, 2008, from Wikipedia http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mercedes_Benz (song)

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