Columns
Spirituality



(Nancy Sylvester)



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November 17, 2022

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"Contemplation," says Thomas Merton, "is essentially a listening in silence, an expectancy."

In the Northern Hemisphere and in the Midwest of the United States, autumn is a time of expectancy. It signals the coming arrival of the deep silence the winter darkness opens to us. Fall, with its brilliant display of color as it says goodbye, teaches us that for the new to come something must change. It offers us a way of being as we await the future.

This fall, the leaves outdid themselves and I immersed myself in this transition as I traveled I-94 between Detroit and Chicago at what was the peak time for the leaves' transformation. The experience stayed with me. Seeing family and friends for the first time since the pandemic and living into the outcome of the midterm elections, I sensed the leaves and this season would become the focus for this reflection.

I offer, then, a simple meditation of both listening in silence and reflecting on how the trees invite us to prepare for the next season in our lives. (I will use pictures that I took, some of which are short videos.)

Let us begin by simply becoming present to this moment. Take a few deep breaths and quiet your mind, open your heart, consent to divine mystery, God's loving presence active within you.

Pause for a few minutes.



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Gaze at the trees displaying their color and the fullness of their life.

Get in touch with how you feel as you bask in their presence and in the presence of all the trees you have enjoyed during the autumns of your life.

Reflect on who or what provides a fullness in your life; who or what is coming to completion; who or what is ready to burst forth in new ways; who or what is ready to transition.

Offer thanks for the joy and gift these are and have been to you.



Listen to the leaves as they prepare for the next stage of their journey.

The leaves are not silent as they start to get buffeted by the wind.

What feelings do you have as you deepen your awareness of change in your life, in our church and society? How do you experience the "rustling wind"? What sounds come forth in you as you feel the shifting winds in your life: as you experience

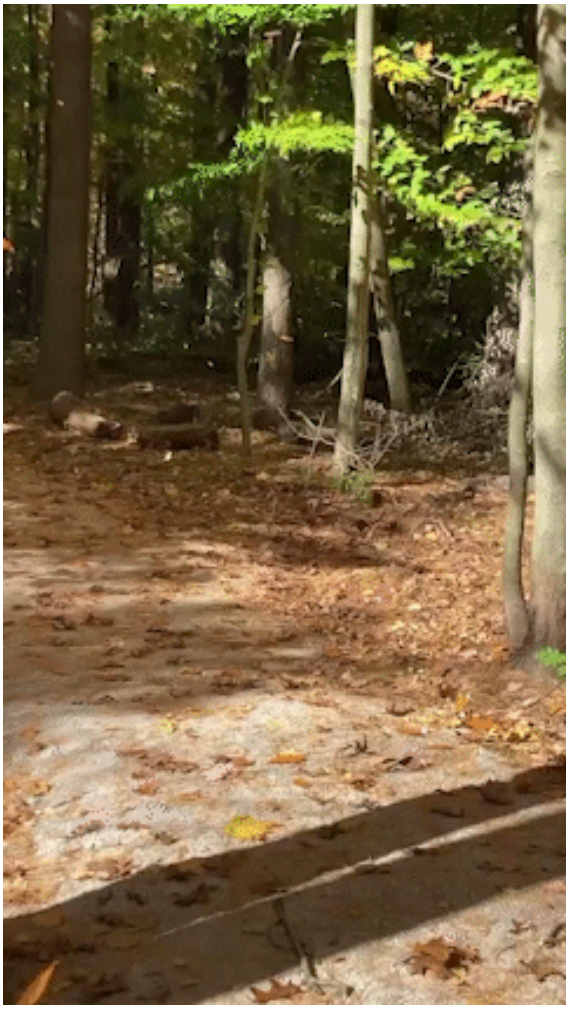
friends diminishing; homes, institutions being sold or transformed; beliefs and values deeply held being questioned and challenged?

Give voice to those sounds in a prayer of lament.



What do you feel as you look at the few leaves who are holding on for dear life.

What are you holding onto for dear life? What or who, are you unable to let go of so you can prepare for what is emerging in your life?



The letting go is almost complete, as the leaves fall gently yet swiftly onto the ground.

How do you feel as you let go, or as that which you love is taken from you? Can you feel the descent and the falling to the ground? Can you sense the next resting place for future growth?



Finally, the last leaf returns to earth, the source of its transformation. The trees — although seemingly barren — prepare to bring forth new life in a few months.

Now is the time of expectancy ... of waiting ...

How will you wait so as to be alert to what is emerging in your life? Can you feel hope in this place of expectancy?

Pause and simply breathe again.

Stay with your experience for a few moments.

End with a simple *amen* or *namaste*, honoring the divine within you.

Having grown up in the Midwest, for me autumn has always coincided with the season of Advent. Advent is the liturgical season within the Christian tradition during

which we prepare for the celebration of the Incarnation, of Christmas. We expect God's love because Jesus is divine love incarnate and dwelt among us. Our faith assures us that divine love is present with us and in us through all the seasons of our lives.

This Advent, enter into contemplation. Listen in silence. Expect divine love to emerge in you as the seeds of spring are already beginning.

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