Columns
Spirituality



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In her poem "The Poet Visits the Museum of Fine Arts," Mary Oliver reflects on the rose, describing it both on its solitary journey to full flowering with "its exotic fragrance" and in doing that, how it offers "something, from its small self, to the entirety of the world."

In a year when the James Webb Space Telescope reveals the birth of the stars — of which our galaxy alone has over 200 billion — and in the great expanse of the universe with its billions of galaxies, an individual can feel so small, insignificant, and alone.

When access to social media brings us face to face with all the shifting and conflicting worldviews embodied in the 8 billion human beings now occupying our one planet, an individual can lose a sense of grounding or rootedness amid the confusing values and beliefs.

The immensity and complexity of the world in which we live can be overwhelming. Yet, the invitation is there for each of us to become who we are at our essence, at our core. Like the rose, each of us has our own exotic fragrance and we each have something to give to the entirety of the world.

Those words speak to me of the season we are in — a time of preparation, of awakening to, and celebrating the fullness of life. Each year, Advent invites us to consciously anticipate Divine Loving come alive. Each Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus in his uniqueness and in his universal gift of self, transforming our evolutionary process.

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In Jesus we have the embodiment of God, Divine Mystery. Born into a time of great upheaval within first century Palestine, he was caught between the Jewish beliefs and the insights that arose within him as he matured. His followers and those who would write down their memories of this man, understood that Jesus offered a different way of being in the world. His unique fragrance challenged the purity laws of his time. He welcomed those who were thought to be unclean. He spoke with women. He befriended lepers, tax collectors, the lame and those possessed with demons. He identified with the words of the prophet Isaiah to bring good news to the

poor.

He was willing to live out of his most authentic self, and he offered it to the world. Yet his life ended ignominiously. Betrayed, abandoned, crucified. I suspect he felt alone, confused and insignificant — wondering if this was all worth it.

What permeated his consciousness was the knowledge that he had to become who he was. He kept evolving into the person who was firmly grounded in Divine Loving, in the God he called Abba. He kept evolving into his Divine self. Christmas celebrates that Divine Mystery in its completeness in Jesus and as it continues unfolding in our lives.

Christmas offers us the rarest gift we can receive: a celebration of our uniqueness and our relationship to each other and the world in its entirety. We are not alone, but we are unique. Like the rose we each have our own fragrance and our own thorns — those desires, attractions, and needs that blind us to the gift within us. That keep us from opening that gift of self.

Our contemplative practice makes us aware of that gift and deepens our desire to open it, freeing us to engage all that distracts us and keeps us from seeing who we are.

When we do choose to open that gift, we are invited to live out of Christ consciousness as you and me. It is to embody the good news Jesus preached 2,000 years ago. It is to offer our unique exotic fragrance to the world.

The universe is vast and change is constant. However, each of us in our uniqueness is essential to the present and emerging future. Our source is Divine loving — intimate and unending.

We won't find that present under the Christmas tree, but do not be fooled. It is within us just waiting to be unwrapped.

May you have a blessed and Merry Christmas!