



Vision and Viewpoint

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Where Is God?

The Sufi tell stories that say all I think I'll ever know about finding God.

The first story is a disarming and compelling one. It is also, I think, a troublesome one, a fascinating one, a chastening one: "Help us to find God," the seeker begged the Elder. "No one can help you there," the Elder answered. "But why not?" the seeker insisted. "For the same reason that no one can help a fish to find the ocean." The answer is clear: There is no one who can help us find what we already have.

The second story is even more challenging. "Once upon a time," the Sufi say, "a seeker ran through the streets shouting over and over again, 'We must put God into our lives. We must put God into our lives.'" "Ah, poor soul," an Elder smiled wanly. "If only we realized the truth: God is always in our lives. The spiritual task is simply to recognize that."

As a Benedictine, a disciple of an order historically devoted to the Sacrament of the Ordinary, I know how disappointing, how exhilarating that kind of advice can be. The neophyte seeks to pass the test of spiritual heroics; the wise seek to accomplish only the testimony of integrity. The young think the task is to buy God by their good efforts; the insightful know that the task is to want God beyond the lure of lesser ends, including even the trappings of spirituality.

For my own part, I entered religious life intent on being spiritually intrepid. I wanted something far more romantic than the Sacrament of the Ordinary. I expected to find formulas tried and true, ideas that were esoteric, a life that was mystical, a regimen that was at least duly demanding, if not momentarily ascetic. What I found were spiritual manuals that were convoluted and academic, at best, and a community that was simple and centered in God always. The writers had missed the mark; the women were living the life. It was very disappointing. And it was very right.

God is not in the whirlwind, not in blustering and show, Scripture teaches us. God is in the breeze, in the very atmosphere around us, in the little things that shape our lives. God is in the contradictions that assail us, in the circumstances that challenge us, in the attitudes that impel us, in the motives that drive us, in the life goals that demonstrate our real aspirations, in the burdens that wear us down, in the actions that give witness to the values in our hearts. God is in the stuff of life, not in the airy-fairy of fertile imaginations bent on the pursuit of the preternatural. God is where we are, including in the very weaknesses that vie for our souls.

God is not a mystery to be sought in strange places and arcane ways. God is a mystery to be discovered within us and around us. And savored.

—from "O Wonder of Wonders," *How can I find god?*, ed. James Martin, S.J. (Triumph Books)