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Learning to praise as an environmental strategy

Donna Schaper | May. 17, 2013 Eco Catholic

?Praise almost always seems to be inner health made audible.? ? C.S. Lewis

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The truth is I feel pretty helpless about the capital ?E? environment. Thus, I spend a lot of time praising the small ?e??s, the environments that are left and constitute the places where I live, here and now.

I have a personal practice called ?The Squares Project,? which keeps track of all the squares or neighborhoods in New York City I know. I square them on a big map of each of the five boroughs. There is nothing I like more than meandering to Queens and finding a new four-blocker, with a good restaurant.

I started keeping maps like this when some members of my congregation in Miami showed me theirs. They had marked every ethnic restaurant where they had eaten over 30 years. They even kept ratings.

I keep another couple of praise records of my small ?e??s. I have a book called ?Walk While the Moon is Full? that lists almost every full moon I have enjoyed for the last 13 years. The book was a birthday gift, and somehow I just started writing in it.

The memories are wonderful because I am just about always in a different place, looking at that same old capital ?M? moon from a different small ?m? moment. I also have colored a map of the world showing all the places I have already visited.

No one but me is really interested in all these small ?m? minutes. Some even call them minutiae, of one person praising one environment at one time. Since they do move me to the act of praise, and not just in prayer, I defend my practices of praise.

Praise can be recording what you have seen, refusing to be present while not noticing what place or moon you are inhabiting. Anatole Broyard says the art of travel is to notice what you think you have already seen. I have seen a lot of moons, and a lot of places. Now I am learning to praise them.

The record keeping helps. I call it squaring because it lets me know both how small a place can be, and also how large it is.

A Prayer for My Home River, with hopes that you will write yours:

For rivers that start way north and come way south,

Hear our Prayer.

For people who have left the pews yet long for something sacramental.

Hear our River.

For a way to connect ourselves to a place and a time,

Hear our Prayer.

O God, add a sacramental dimension to our everyday lives, even if it is nothing more than remembering where we live, at the end of a great ribbon that dumps into the sea and squaring up to it, noticing it and not just seeing it. Amen.

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