

Praying In and With the Dark

by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

Every morning, unless it is raining, I go outside to pray and meditate in the early morning (between 5 and 6 am). Most evenings I return to the same spot after 7 pm to give thanks for the day.

The space is in our yard, and I usually sit on a swing in front of a large white oak tree. In the colder months, it is dark (although a lamp from a nearby playground casts reduces that); in the warmer months there is less darkness. But whether in dark or light I am surrounded by not only the tree but many bushes and other trees, squirrels and birds, even the occasional bunny.

This may not seem to you like learning to move in and with the dark, but it does to me. Over time, as I learn more about indigenous cultures, I have come to understand that we—not just humans but all creatures, all beings—share this space, not only in our yard but everywhere in the world.

Thus, I am ceasing to put the non-human parts of creation in the box marked “things.” In other words, I no longer keep them in the dark space of “other” where they are considered to be objects not subjects. We are each and all citizens of the world, and our relationships matter.



I have a confession to make. I hope you will not think me delusional. Every time I am in that space I kiss the oak tree, and each morning I hug him (I have decided he is male and have given him the name “Magnus,” Latin masculine for great). You can see part of him in the photo. He is old and large enough that I cannot reach around him in one hug, so my hug comes in four parts as I move around him.

Brothers

I say good morning, Magnus,
thank you, Magnus.

Good evening, Magnus
thank you, Magnus—
right after I say
Good morning, God,
Good evening, God,
and give God thanks
for my beloved Magnus
for his strength, endurance,
grace and beauty,
and for all his neighbors
and all in the universe.

And I do more.

After my prayer each morning
and meditation each evening
I rise from my seat on the yard swing,
go to him, hands and arms outstretched,
hugging him, hanging on to him,
breathing in his beauty and strength,
sharing the kiss of peace,
renewed in my wonder and gratitude for all creation,
which with divine guidance and nurturing
helps keep this topsy-turvy, messed up,
often dysfunctional world from spinning apart.

Do you have a Magnus near you?

He or she need not be
a very large white oak
like my brother, my friend, my guide—
neither size nor age nor species matter.
You can do as I did;
you can sit with one or ones
to whom you feel drawn and listen
until one day you hear the invitation
—it may come in a whisper of breeze,
a bending down of a branch,
a leaf falling in your lap,
a squirrel sitting in the crook of a limb

gazing down at you, looking up, chattering
until it scampers up the tree a bit
and looks down and chatters more
and then higher, looking down again,
until finally you know, as I did,
that I was being invited to join
in my limited human way
this bushy-tailed messenger
to receive and share the blessings of Magnus.