

SEASONS IN LIFE

Seasonal changes always evoke excitement for me. I mark my calendar when I see the first robin each spring. This usually happens some time after I watch crocuses defiantly push their way up above the yet cold ground. I know that it is really summer when I bite into my first piece of slurpy watermelon or fresh corn on the cob. Come fall I welcome nippy weather synonymous with football games, pumpkin faces and the colorist glory of red, orange and yellow leaves interspersed with sturdy evergreen trees. And what can match or surpass the grandeur of the first snowfall blanketing the earth? This awesome sight triggers eagerness for cross-country skiing. All of the above signs are annual reasons that I am glad to be a mid-western resident.

Marvelous as these exterior signs are of the year's recurring cycles, my interior spirit was stretched last year at an evening lecture in Toledo. Sister Joyce Rupp, a Servite Sister from Omaha, invited us to reflect on the various seasons occurring within us. To do so she provided us with a paper bearing a circle. It was evenly divided into quadrants representing the seasons.

The spring quadrant held a nest with eggs waiting for the hatching moment. The topic to ponder was **SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT'S DEVELOPING AND MOVING TOWARDS BEING BIRTHED**. How helpful to be reminded that no matter what age there are always brand new moments to encounter, to embrace, to challenge myself. Perhaps my decision to start learning Spanish this fall is a "spring" moment for me. I'll know at the semester's end.

Summer's quadrant pictured a healthy cluster of grapes. The lead statement was, **SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT'S BEARING FRUIT**. This encourages me to ponder the profuse blessings that God has lavished on me and in so doing caused fruitful labors in my day by day ministry.

Autumn appropriately showed leaves falling from a tree. Next to it was the phrase, **SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT NEEDS TO BE LET GO**. How easy it is to cling to realities that have completed their use or relationships that have rounded out mutual benefit. From my experience letting go is never simple

but doing so allows room for a fresh freedom that cannot happen until I release whatever is binding.

Winter rounded out the circle's quadrants depicting a barren tree that once gave life, shed life and awaits new life again. The guided meditation read, **SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE THAT HAS DIED OR FEELS FROZEN RIGHT NOW**. Just as real as the birthing, bearing fruit and letting go are facing facets of life that are dead or dormant. For me this is usually a quiet time, sometimes comfortable but other times painful and empty. It is often a time to pay attention to the biblical admonition, "Be still and know that I am God."

In my day-by-day round at Mercy Hospital where I am privileged to serve as pastoral care director, I see all four seasons evident as I go from one patient's room to the next. Chronological age does not determine the season. I have been inspired by the resilience and hope of a 90-year-old person coping with a bothersome hip fracture. I have been touched by a 24-year-old's ability to let go of life gracefully as she weakens by the month.

At other times, I see a patient frozen in bitterness because of a past experience which has not healed yet. On still another occasion, I hear someone view illness as an invitation to appreciate a new lease on life because the cancer was discovered in its early stages. Truly, each day is different and urges me to remain in tune with the seasons of my own inner journey.

I close inviting you to take time or make time this month to observe which of the four seasons is/are most up front center for you right now no matter what the season is outside. What is coming to birth... bearing fruit... letting go... lying dormant? My thanks to Sister Joyce for nudging new thoughts for me with hopes she has done the same for you.

Sister Sue Tracy, OP
Oncology Staff Chaplain
Spectrum Health
733 Bridge Street, NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49504
E-mail: Toodooosue@aol.com

THE FOUR SEASONS PRAYER

WINTER, humble servant of creation, with brisk determination you encompass our land. You clothe us into warm wraps, sending us out into the weather to gather the lessons you scatter. You call us to sit by the fireplace and feed each other stories. You invite us to listen to that which is invisible. You are the contemplative season. In unseen and unknown places you faithfully do your work.

In the winter storms of our lives, teach us PATIENCE. May we learn to trust the goodness of what we cannot see. As the ground becomes frozen may we have the COURAGE to visit the frozen ground of our own lives, believing in the life that is hidden. You clear the air. You protect the seed. You embrace reality.

You, O Winter, hold our fears until they can be transformed into TRUST. You are the beautiful season that we sometimes overlook. Share with us your virtues of SOLITUDE, contemplation and faith. Surround us with your fresh, crisp breath and protect the seed that is sleeping in the depths of our being.

SPRING, graceful, playful child of creation, you never walk; you always leap, skip or dance. You rush in with baskets full of life, giving us all spring fever. We promise to multiply the life you bring by planting new seeds. We will believe in the secret invisible life in each seed as we drop it into the rich soil you have provided.

In this season of rebirth, teach us the steps to your dance. Encourage us to celebrate the exuberant life rising around us and within us. Absorb us in the ritual of rising. Remind us never to be ashamed of the beauty that is ours. Bless us, awaken us from productive slumbers that we might believe in the fruit born from the womb of darkness.

Your secrets once sleeping in the heart of the earth are stretching toward the sun. Help us stretch with them as we reach for all we can be. Share with us your virtues of JOY, rebirth and HOPE. In this season of resurrection, may the brokenness of our world be healed by your contagious spirit and joy.

SUMMER, earth's fruitful season, how rich and fruitful you are. You are the greenest of seasons. Your green is not the pale green of your young sister, spring. It is the bright robe of forest goddess. From your summer storehouse we receive the oxygen we need each day.

Your silent, golden sun greets us each morning and grow more intense as the day wears on. You come to us with arms full of light, long days and short nights. You warm the earth and help the gardens grow that we may be nourished with fruits and vegetables. May we learn from your shining. May we, too, shine on others and lead them to new growth. May we be nourishment for all we meet on the road of life.

Teach us to stand still under your green canopy and breathe in the treasures you bring. Invite us to play like a child through your warm, sunny days. You are a sacrament of hope. Your days are full of earth-gifts. Share with us your virtues of PASSION, GENEROSITY, FRUITFULNESS and FAITHFULNESS. May all of these be visible in our garden of life.

AUTUMN, season of WISDOM and TRANSFORMATION, you are the golden season. You come, laughing out a harvest. The ripening of our crops has made the earth a dinner table, and you are the one who serves us. You turn our faces toward the west and remind us of the transitory nature of all things.

You call us to SURRENDER. You stir up in our souls a great hunger, a yearning for transcendence. At every moment you are dying to life while we want to live without dying. Teach us the art of surrendering that we might taste the fruit of buried seeds.

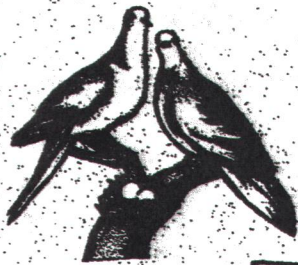
Teach us to live wisely between our birth and our death. Open our hearts to all that needs transformation. Invite us to join in your beautiful dance of death. Share with us your virtues of ACCEPTANCE, OBEDIENCE and wisdom. Abide with us forever. Transforming, honest season, you know when to let go. Teach us!

SACRED SEASONS OF EARTH, as you sweep over our lands and through our hearts, you wear the face of God. How deeply we feel the effects of your many moods. You whisper death chants to us, then lovingly sing out blossoms. You call us into nesting places that we might ponder all that needs to be reborn in our lives. You tell us stories of life and death, transformation and rebirth, stories of waiting, patience, resting, and hope. You enfold us in fruitfulness, then strip us bare. You grow up in us and season us with your temperamental personalities. O Seasons of the earth, bless us with your gracious ability to surrender at the slightest invitation from the Divine Spirit. As you pass over the fields of earth, open our ears and our eyes that we might discern the wisdom you bequeath to the seasons of our hearts.

Joyce Rupp & Macrina Wiederkehr

Spring

Something in your life
That's developing and moving
Toward being "birthed".



Summer

Something in your life
That's bearing fruit.



Autumn

Something in your life
That needs to be let go.



Winter

Something in your life
that has died or feels "frozen"
right now.



APRIL SHOWERS

Though April showers may come your way,
They bring the flowers that bloom in May,
So if it's raining, have no regrets,
Because it isn't raining rain, you know, it's raining violets.
And when you see clouds upon the hills,
You soon will see crowds of daffodils,
So keep on looking for a bluebird and listening for his song,
Whenever April showers come along.

TIP-TOE THROUGH THE TULIPS

Tip-toe to the window, by the window, that is where'll I be,
Come, tip-toe through the tulips with me.
Tip-toe from your pillow, to the shadow of a willow tree
And tip-toe through the tulips with me.
Knee-deep in flowers we'll stray; we'll keep the showers away.
And if I kiss you in the garden, in the moonlight, will you pardon me,
Come, tip-toe through the tulips with me.

IN THE GOOD OL' SUMMERTIME

In the good old summer time, in the good old summer time,
Strolling through the shady lanes, with your baby mine.
You hold her hand and she holds yours, and that's a very good sign
That she's your tootsey wootsey in the good old summer time.

TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALLGAME

Take me out to the ballgame; take me out with the crowd,
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack,
I don't care if I ever get back.
Oh we'll root root root for the home team,
If they don't win it's a shame,
For it's one, two, three strikes you're out at the old ballgame.

SHINE ON, HARVEST MOON

Oh, shine on, shine on harvest moon up in the sky.
I ain't had no lovin' since Jan. Feb. June or July.
Snow time ain't no time to stay outdoors and spoon,
So shine on, shine on harvest moon for me and my gal.

WINTER WONDERLAND

Sleigh bells ring, are you list'nin? In the lane snow is glist'nin;
A beautiful sight, we're happy tonight,
Walking in a winter wonderland.
Gone away is the bluebird; here to stay is a new bird.
He sings a love song as we go along, walking in a winter wonderland.
In the meadow we can build a snow-man, Then pretend that he is Parson Brown.
He'll say, "Are you married?" We'll say, "No man! But you can do the job when
you're in town."
Later on, we'll conspire as we dream by the fire.
To face unafraid the plans that we made, walkin' in a winter wonderland.