

October the Beautiful
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The month of October invites us to visit her fall fashion show. Throughout the United States, Canada, and other parts of the world, she primps before us decked out in a spectrum of variegated colors. Her wardrobe appears in hues and tints like vivid greens and striking chartreuse, in scarlet, cranberry and Indian reds, burnt sienna, pumpkin orange, coral, and peach, goldenrod, canary and pale yellows, and finally the gold of amber. Then toward the end of the month, her leaves gracefully descend to form a carpet beneath our feet. Here is a feast for the eyes that prompts exclamations of wonder. Mother Nature bows as we applaud her performance for 2017.



Decked out for Contemplation

During the month of October, we see before us nature's order, logic, harmony, and beauty. The other seasons prompts her: It's your turn "to shine in use." Edna St. Vincent Millay expresses these thoughts in her poem, "God's World." The first stanza appears below and the final, later on:

O world! I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, they wide grey skies!
Thy mist, their roll and rise!
Thy woods, this autumnal day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour! That gaunt crag
To crush! To lift the lean of that black bluff!
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough!

Natural Contemplation, a Stepping Stone to Prayer

A thing of beauty is so powerful, so magnetic to behold that it draws us to its self. In the process, we forget ourselves; we are taken out of ourselves. This is contemplation in its simplest description. It happens in observing a sunset and a ballet as well as when we solve a mathematical problem. It's that 'eureka' moment. Then we experience deep enjoyment, satisfaction, and oneness with the thing contemplated. Finally, we are elevated and lifted up by the experience of beauty; we are made better persons. To see well is to go out of oneself in order to discover the beautiful.

October is the perfect month to contemplate the logic, order, harmony, and beauty of God's world. Not only are autumnal foliage given to us for delight. Autumn begins the season of harvesting as well. Whether we live on a farm or in the city, putting our hands into the soil connects us to nature's bounty and nature's beauty. Freshly-harvested hay bales, fall vegetables like corn, squash and pumpkins still recall grateful harvesting by our first colonists in Massachusetts. Garlands and wreaths of fall colors are still proudly displayed in ads, on many a doorpost, and in wardrobe colors. It's a glorious time of the year—October, when men and women seek communion with the earth and give thanks for its good things. Appropriately, Edna St. Vincent Millay's last stanza follows:

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew this;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou’st made the world too beautiful this year;
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf, prithee, let no bird call.

During October, we quite naturally turn to the Source of all beauty in a posture of gratitude for the beauty of the earth. Plainly and visibly do we see that men and women are receivers of all good things through God’s generosity. And so, the month of October prompts us to give thanks for those things that are bound up with eating and drinking. Americans can also anticipate the bounty of Thanksgiving, yet to come.

In Catholicism, men and women are double receivers. Not only are we fitted out with goods of the natural order; we are also gifted beyond measure. God gives his Son who nourishes us on his Body and Blood under the appearance of bread and wine, fruits of the earth made holy and divine. This awesome, yes awesome, reality prompts the simple prayer, “Lord, nourish me; I am hungry for your graces.” The poem by Joseph Thomas Nolan on the beauty of the fall season sums up the theme of this essay, the beautiful month of October:

For autumn and the leaves of death
We give you thanks, O Lord, and seek to praise
Those northern lands that can be a glory, women
And men and at peace find rest from empty fields
And spilling barns. We thank you for abundant days,
For all the richer life your Son has promised,
More than eye, taste, and even autumn can provide.

And present things: books, faces, friends return,
The fire’s dance, the shouts of play,
The scarlet maple and the distant hills.
Your gift is like a wine,
Pressed down and running over,
Good manners for October days.

We give you thanks for banquets and for bread,
But more, that you are he who saves
The very leaf that falls
And seeks communion with the earth.
And we are never dead,
Although we sleep and winter will return.
Gather us, O Lord: we are the sons and daughters of your desire.

Lord of the harvest,
God of the beautiful world,
We are your glory, and we give you praise. Amen.

