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Welcoming winter's clarity

Rich Heffern | Jan. 28, 2010 NCR Today

When I mention to people here in the Midwest that I am a fan of the season of winter, they look at me in a puzzled, perplexed way. We winter fans are few, it seems. Here's why I like this unpopular season so much.

Take a walk on a winter afternoon. The nip in the wind wakes a quiet exultation that is peculiar to this season. Winter is streamlined and elementary. Its purposes are honest and straighforward. Nothing is hidden or obstructed with green as in summer. The anatomy of places is plainly visible. In the countryside the colors of its short days are mostly solemn grays, silvers, blacks and warm, homespun shades of brown, russet and tan. All these colors are muted and understated. The sillhouettes of tree branches against a sullen grey clouded sky look like a revelation.

Winter contains the divine. It is no accident that the season richest in liturgy is the winter time. Advent, Christmas, Lent are full of devotions, practices, pageantry and rich and meaningful prayer, as we celebrate outer and inner mysteries. Winter is vital to our spiritual lives, to the richness and wholeness of being human.

Winter is a total eclipse of the year, the light of which illumines things in a special way. The land quietly sings winter and even the stones on the ground celebrate the heedless now and newness of the world. Winter is the still point that is also the turning crest of a wave, a candenced phrase and rhythm of the endless poetry that is creation.

Winter nights are long but tomorrow is also a day, and the day after that is the first day of spring. And what would spring mean to us without its white-haired predecessor to pave the way with rites of passage, to purify us with fasts, excorcize us with liturgies, edify us with plain ikons hanging simply before our flickering candles. Winter always prepares us to receive the green consecrations of spring.

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