

By Pat Haggerty

I recently facilitated a poetry reading for a group of English teachers. It was a wonderful experience. It deepened in me the sense of the beauty of words and the power of language. Each poet read her poetry with such feeling and intensity. It was like listening to a personal revelation.

For some reason, I got to thinking about some Catholic poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and Sister Madeleva Wolff. Many are familiar with Hopkins work, but, how many of us know of Sister Madeleva and her contribution to American poetry? I remember reading some of Sister Madeleva's work while I was in high school. I went to a Catholic high school, so that is probably why her works were included in our anthology. I doubt that I would have heard of her at Central High School (the public high school in our town).

Sister Madeleva was a woman before her time, and certainly a religious with a progressive view. She was born Mary Evaline Wolff in a small town in Wisconsin in 1887. She became a Sister of the Holy Cross in 1908 and would eventually become the president of St. Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana. She became a prolific writer and poetry was her genre. In her adult life, she wrote one poem a month and most of them she submitted for publication. In her autobiography, written in 1959, she talks about her search for beauty: "I had watched beauty go begging for a home and a family. I knew that of the trinity---goodness, truth and beauty, each an equation for God---beauty is the most palpable, the most irresistible. I have called it God's

visibility."

During the season of Advent, I challenge the readers of my little essay to seek the beauty that is around us. If we ponder that, it really speaks to the "visibility" of God. In Matthew's gospel for the first Sunday of Advent, we are asked to "stay awake." Matthew is referring to our staying awake not knowing "which day your Lord will come." (Mt 24:42). I would encourage us to stay awake and alert to the beauty of God---to his visibility.

Let us look for beauty in the bell-ringer outside of the supermarket, in the faces of the children singing carols, in the elderly woman knitting a beautiful hat for a Christmas gift, and in the eyes of the infant who is a whisper from God.

Lastly, we can't overlook the beauty of nature. There is a crystalline beauty in the new-fallen snow. There is a beauty and stillness in the star-speckled sky. There is a verdant beauty in the lush evergreen tree. There is a simple beauty in the tiny birds eating the seeds from your bird-feeder.

During this season of Advent, look for beauty. You will find it and you will find God.