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Journalist Offers Field Guide to Beholding the Everyday Miracle, Season by Season

Writer Barbara Mahany finds the sacred nearly every time she steps out the door. As a seasoned journalist who spent years as a reporter and columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*, she knows to take copious notes. Her new book is a seasonal field guide to wonder and wisdom: *Slowing Time: Seeing the Sacred Outside Your Kitchen Door* (Abingdon Press, \$15.99 paper, October 7, 2014)

“Enraptured by the miracle of this holy Earth’s turning,” Mahany has learned to pay close attention to the seasons. She takes readers through the bounty of the calendar: winter, spring, summer, and autumn. For each season, she provides “A-Count-Your-Blessings-Calendar,” 14 suggestions for “paying the art of supreme attention,” or “meditative post-its to remind us that we abound in holiness.”

Each section includes essays pinpointing the divine in ordinary moments; a “Wonderlist” of that season’s glories; field notes on natural phenomena such as moon phases, plant life, bird activity; and a recipe, such as Beef Stew with Pomegranate Seeds Nestled Beside Aromatic Rice, a hearty winter’s night dinner.

Because Mahany is Catholic and her husband is Jewish, her family encounters the Divine in the rituals and idioms of two faith traditions. She draws from that shared experience, and from the spirit of the almanac, scrapbook, and field guide, to offer a springboard for the reader’s own “meandering into the Holy.” Whether the summons is to unfurl a blanket on the fire escape or in a meadow, to settle in for a night of stargazing or an afternoon’s cloud parade, or to bundle up for a winter’s night moonwalk, Mahany offers scores of simple suggestions on how to behold the everyday miracle in each season:

- Winter, the season of deepening: “Take extra care to scatter cracked corn, peanut butter-smear pine cones, and suet cakes for the loyal backyard critters who’ve settled in for winter, especially when arctic winds screech. Whisper thanks for those who keep watch on us.”

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- Spring, the season of quickening: “Salute the day-after-day resurrection of the sunrise: Awake before the dawn, amble out to where you can catch the hoisting up of the fiery orb, stretch before its first-cast sunbeams, bow down, be humbled.”

- Summer, the season of plenitude: “Make daily rounds of the growing things in the so-called garden. Carry clippers. Cut a new bouquet every day. Tuck them in odd places, like next to children’s beds, just to see if anyone notices. Whisper vespers for the lovelies.”

- Autumn, the season of awe: “Regard the autumn frost: Miracle of sunbeams captured in wee globes of dew, flash-frozen. Or might it be the cold sweat of dawn’s labor, the hard work of night turning to day? Either way, let it take your breath away. First blessing of the day.”

“There is unending grace, it seems, in allowing an ordinary moment to turn itself inside out,” Mahany writes. “To expose the whimsy of an hour when all that really matters is that you’re not doing the thing you thought you would have been, should have been.”

Barbara Mahany is a former reporter and columnist for the *Chicago Tribune*. In her page-two column, she told stories of her family’s life that drew in thousands of readers for decades. She explores the sacred mysteries with a voice recognizable and clear. A sought-after speaker, retreat leader, and writing teacher, she lives with her family in Wilmette, Illinois.

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by Barbara Mahany
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