Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Kelly Sikkema)



by Sr. Nancy Sylvester

Contributor

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February 1, 2024

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Recently, I have felt that Debbie Downer and I are joined at the hip. Debbie was a character who appeared in NBC's "Saturday Night Live" sketches between 2004 and 2020. Her pessimism would seep into every conversation, adding bad news to whatever was being discussed.

She came to mind as I reflected that whenever I read the news or listen to what is happening in my friends' lives, it feels like the chaos ending 2023 has only intensified. If I dare to hope, there's Debbie telling me it is useless. If I want to share something good that has happened, there she is reminding me of how much suffering is in other people's lives and how dare I feel good!

The other morning, I awoke around 4 and simply stayed in a dream-like state. I felt so calm; I wasn’t thinking, I was just enjoying the moment. Then suddenly the words "bursts of joy" came to me. What could be called an inability to sleep became a time of joy. I could feel a smile begin to form.

Then when I woke up and got out of bed, I saw the first major snowfall had arrived, and its beauty made me smile. Ah, I thought, another "burst of joy."

At a time when there is so much suffering in the world, too many violent conflicts among nations and religions, and sickness and death among family and friends, one can feel guilty for feeling joy or hope. "How selfish," you hear. Where is your compassion? Get real. A host of accusations can be hurled from within, becoming a burden you now carry.

Those Debbie Downer responses can get to us, but they won't sustain us over time. Negativity, anger, and hopelessness do not generate the energy to unfold the future that is needed. We need to be real and hopeful. We need to be compassionate to the suffering and to find happiness in life.

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This is where bursts of joy come in. We have to become more aware of the bursts of joy that we experience in our lives. These moments don't have to last long. They are short, intense eruptions that awaken us to another aspect of life in the midst of all that is going on around us.

Here are a couple other bursts of joy that I became aware of these past weeks:

- the beauty of the small white lights that encircle my bedroom during the winter months;
- female figurines of the Divine. which come from many countries and create a ritual space for me;
- a unique sunrise surprising me as I was driving to the airport: a chimney-like column of red springing forth from the emerging sun;
- the mother sitting behind me teaching her child English in ways that reminded me of how I am learning Spanish and realizing we are all beginners in getting to know each other's languages.

Great insights? Unique experiences? No. What they do is help me remember that there is another side to the chaos around us. That there is another dimension to life to complement the suffering and the loss. That there is joy.

Contemplative practice helps us awaken to all the dimensions in our lives. It allows us the spaciousness to hold all the polarities, to embrace both the shadow and the light. Let us take the time to acknowledge the Debbie Downer within us and then awaken to all those bursts of joy that erupt in our lives.