Voices of Sisters
Spirituality

Sr. Nodelyn Abayan interacts wih a baby at a campus child care center in San Francisco in February 2014. She said she's grateful for the trust and sacred nature of working with babies and families. (Courtesy of Nodelyn Abayan)

by Sr. Nodelyn Abayan

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I love reading quotes and find them mesmerizing. They are akin to brief stanzas of poetry that linger in the air. I once came across this quote credited to Benedictine Br. David Steindl-Rast: "Grateful eyes look at each thing as if they had never seen it before and caress it as if they would never see it again." (Do pause, reflect and let each syllable settle in your soul!)

Most of my ministerial work has been devoted to babies and their families. When I completed my master's program in early childhood education at the nearby state university, I was hired as an infant head teacher in the campus child care center. This place is a nurturing ground for budding early childhood educators. I was also a mentor, coach and supervisor to the interns placed in my classroom.

This center, a cradle of care, education, professional development and research, welcomed children from the tender age of 6 months to the exploratory age of 5. In this haven, I flourished for nearly six years, cherishing every moment! Holding and caressing infants, feeling the blessing of their weight in my arms, I felt immense gratitude. Parents entrusted their most precious gifts to me, forging a profound trust and shared care partnership.

This is why the quote resonated so deeply — it echoed the sacred moments I shared with these tiny souls. I recall times of quiet praise and thanksgiving to God as I lulled a baby to sleep, overwhelmed by the miracle cradled against my chest, gazing at a baby with so much care and love. How these infants trusted me so completely! Our heartbeats merged into one as they drifted off to sleep to the soft hum of their favorite lullaby. What an honor it was to contribute to their early growth! (A mentor once shared with us that as early childhood educators, we are essentially architects of infants' developing brains.) If only I could capture the tender gaze of my grateful eyes as I watch them sleep!

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I have been reflecting on the meaning of seeing through grateful eyes. In my experience, having grateful eyes means seeing the world around me as a series of

gifts and blessings. It is about appreciating the beauty in the ordinary, recognizing value in my every experience, and acknowledging the kindness and effort of others, such as cheerfully saying "Thank you" to the barista at a coffee shop or appreciating the meal that one of my sisters in the community put together after her long day of work. With grateful eyes, I view challenges as opportunities for growth and simple moments as worthy of celebration.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18).

I believe this perspective invites me to a deeper connection to life and to God, my Beloved One; enhancing my appreciation for everything from a stunning sunset to a warm conversation.

Grateful eyes transform my vision, encouraging me to look beyond the surface and appreciate the deeper significance of whatever is present in this given moment; because this moment is what we have now! Because God is encountered in the moment.

However, having grateful eyes starts from a content heart. A heart that loves and believes that God's grace for her is enough. It begins by basking in the gaze of God's love upon her, a gaze that is unconditional and accepting. Just as grateful eyes find joy and beauty in every aspect of creation, so too does God look upon us with a gaze full of grace, seeing not just what we are, but who we are, whose we are and what we can become. This insight calls us to view ourselves and others through a lens of compassion and love, recognizing the inherent value, dignity and potential within each person.

The gaze of God, much like grateful eyes, does not overlook flaws or imperfections but sees beyond them the essence of who we are. It is a reminder that we are loved and cherished exactly as we are, while also being called to grow and flourish. In every moment, we are called by the divine presence to fully embrace life, to cherish the wonder of our being, and to regard every person, created beings, and each of our experiences as holy and sacred. Albert Einstein has been credited with the quote, "There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

Writing this reflection inspires me to adopt gratitude not merely as a feeling, but as a fundamental approach to life. This way of "being" is exactly what the world

requires at this moment! As a woman religious, called by God to embody love, I am tasked with nurturing a mindset of gratitude. I am summoned to live life with an open heart, recognizing the interconnectedness of all creation and the infinite love of God. If possible, assist others; if not, at least refrain from causing harm (Dalai Lama XIV, the Art of Happiness). It compels me to engage in mindfulness and appreciation every day, to view the world and all its inhabitants, both sentient and insentient beings, with the same loving gaze and awe that God bestows. It brings to mind another powerful quote, the words of the poet and Jesuit Fr. Gerard Manley Hopkins. "The world is charged with the grandeur of God."

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Simple meditation about basking in the gaze of God

- **Receive and bask in the gaze**: Allow yourself to bask in the divine light of the Holy Spirit. Feel it as a tangible presence that sees and knows you completely, yet embraces you without judgment. Absorb its warmth and let it fill you with peace and love.
- **Reflect on Her Divine Presence**: As you sit in this light, reflect on the idea that this divine gaze is always upon you, always loving and guiding. You are never alone, and you are always enveloped in this love of the Holy Spirit.
- **Express gratitude:** Silently express gratitude for this moment of love connection and the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Thank Her for Her guidance and love every day of your life.