Voices of Sisters
Social Justice



Sr. Margaret Gonsalves is pictured at Niagara Falls, during a recent visit to Canada with her siblings. (Courtesy of Margaret Gonsalves)



by Sr. Margaret Gonsalves

Contributor

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

October 1, 2024

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

It was June 1, 2003, when I first landed in the U.S., a land of freedom and liberty. After a few days of jet lag, I attended parish Mass, after which I joined the sisters of my community for lunch as a farewell party for those who were retiring from parish pastoral ministry.

My superior asked me to join the queue where they were serving food. As I lined up, a beautiful woman stood ahead of me. I waited a long time for her to serve herself and move on, but she didn't move an inch. Feeling hungry, I crossed in front of her and went ahead.

Immediately, she moved ahead of me and blocked me from serving myself. So, I left the line without getting food and told my superior that a woman was not allowing me to serve myself. My superior understood the game and lined up for food, asking me to follow her.



Sr. Margaret Gonsalves and her siblings stayed at the Sheraton hotel opposite Niagara Falls. At night they enjoyed fireworks illuminating the falls. (Courtesy of Margaret Gonsalves)

When I narrated this experience to some of my Asian and African colleagues at the Washington Theological Union, they made me aware that it was color discrimination. For the first time in my life, I became aware of myself as a woman of color. I had never known the power of white supremacy. When white people come to India, we treat them like we would treat God. I was painfully disillusioned.

Recently, along with my siblings, I had the opportunity to enjoy a 24-hour complimentary stay at the Sheraton hotel opposite Niagara Falls. Around 9 p.m., we enjoyed watching fireworks illuminating the falls from the ninth floor of the hotel. The colorful display was mesmerizing.

The next day, we hopped on the Maid of the Mist boat tour to Niagara Falls, cherishing the spectacular view with its booming roar, gigantic power, and uplifting mist creating rainbows, reminiscent of the timeless masterpiece song "What a Wonderful World" by Louis Armstrong:

> I see trees of green/ Red roses too/ I see them bloom/ For me and you/ And I think to myself/ What a wonderful world .../ The colors of the rainbow/ So pretty in the sky /Are also on the faces /Of people going by.

The symphonic and geological wonders gifted me with awe, turning this summer vacation into a classroom. I began seeing the world through rainbow-colored lenses. The powerful vibrations from the falls formed gentle rainbows, revealing oneness in creation.

God's colorful world is so captivating that there is no space for segregation. While taking in the boundless and mind-boggling creation of God, my heart questioned: How long will manmade rules and regulations about color discrimination last?

On Sunday, June 30, I was watching Toronto's Pride Parade. Once again, the vibrant floats and joyful faces, creative performances, displays and enchanting music filled me with awe. They were an expression of promoting equality, inclusion and standing up for human rights.

After watching the colorful Pride march, I listened to an old Hindi film song, "Yeh Kaun Chitrakar Hai":

> Look at the colorful directions .../ Shining with colors and gusto/ Who has adorned these flowers? Who is this painter?/ ... Look at this purity of nature/ You should remember its qualities in your mind/ Let your colors [*of oneness*] shine today .../ The image of the Creator is visible to you from every particle.

In all these colorful poetic expressions of God's harmonic creation, where is there room for discrimination against people of color and different orientations? When will

we step into the shoes of people of color to understand their pain? How long will we neglect the sacredness of creation and our absolute dependence on it?

Advertisement

Are we not one interdependent whole? How long will we continue committing ecocide, extinctions, slavery, and genocide out of fear of different colors? When will we look at others' anguish as our own? Meister Eckhart expressed his anguish: "What happens to another, whether it be a joy or a sorrow, happens to me."

After visiting Yosemite Valley and Niagara Falls, I tend to believe that there is a healing power, through the particles they release. I felt the biochemical reaction that upsurged levels of serotonin, releasing my stress and boosting my energy level.

Being in Canada during the month of June, the colorful celebrations brought me to the classroom of nature's colors. Aren't the organs in our human body sparkling and reflecting light in all the colors of the rainbow? The liver is brown, the heart is red, the bones are white, the retina is black, and bile is greenish-yellow. There are several healing therapies using the seven rainbow colors.

When will the awareness of wonder, reverence and gratitude toward God's colorful creation dawn upon us? When will we stop the hatred and discrimination toward people of other colors? Deborah Chu-Lan Lee expresses her anguish about our colorblindness by saying, "How easy it is to forget and disregard the divine beauty and light within ourselves and in the other."

Doesn't the light from our brother Sun and sister Moon bathe and heal us through colors? Every day, Mother Earth nurtures us with colorful fruits and vegetables. Nutritionists sometimes advise us to include fruits and vegetables of different colors in our diet to achieve balance, rhythm, and remedy deficiencies, restoring vital energy to our bodies.

Colorful flowers in the garden delight us by enhancing our moods. Colorful birds, with their symphonic chirping, entertain us. Aren't we beneficiaries of the unified element of light, which is color?

Just as each color holds the capacity to send vibrations to heal the body, so too does the cosmic body heal through the various colors of people, leading to the oneness of the cosmic community. May we look through the prism of oneness to see that

everything in the universe is encircled by colors, calling us to be.