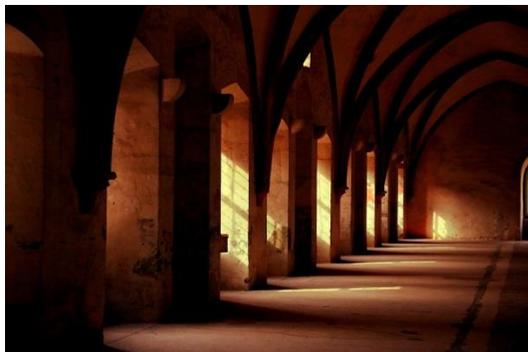


In the Gospel, Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) We can hear in this passage God’s desire to be close to us and God’s willingness to take the first step toward us. This is core to who we are. Even before we know God, God has already reached out to us in love and with the gift of divine life that is forever.

God also draws us moment by moment, using all of our senses, intellect, imagination and memory to connect with us, inviting us into God’s own life ever more deeply.

In John 6:44-51, as in other passages of Scripture, the language of God drawing us is akin to the language of attraction, to that movement of appealing to the other and of resisting separation. There is a pull, like a person wooing their beloved, a magnet attracting metal, a heart drawn to beauty, a philosopher intrigued with an idea. We are always within God’s traction, God’s pull. We may sense it in ordinary, mundane ways, in desolation and darkness, or in vibrant ways.



A number of years ago, when I was working on my master’s degree in theology, I had the privilege of traveling to Italy with two friends, both graduate students – one in medieval Church history and one in international relations. We gave ourselves an amazing tour of the churches in Rome. We happened upon a more obscure church, the name of which I can’t even remember. It was a decent example of a medieval church, but unremarkable compared to others we had seen. As my companions explored the church, I found myself drawn to a darkened passageway in the back. I was fascinated by the history, the stone architecture, the ancient faith and the mystery of where that passageway might lead.

The passageway took me to a dead end: to a spiral staircase behind a locked iron gate. I stood with my hands on the gate, staring forlornly down the steps. The church sacristan appeared and told me that this area was closed to the public because it was being examined by archeologists. Beneath the church, he said, is what they believe to be one of the original gathering places of the early Christian community in Rome, a house church. He excused himself to finish what he had been doing, but then stopped. He said nothing, and simply removed from his pocket a large key. He unlocked the gate and motioned for me to go down the spiral staircase. Then he was gone.

Step by step, I descended century by century into the past. Beneath the church, was a large room with smaller annexes. On the walls were the faint remains of paintings and carved images. I was captivated. My senses saw crumbling ancient stones, inhaled the dust of hundreds of years, and heard the silence of a buried past, but my heart saw the people of the early church – women, men and children sitting on stone ledges, eating bread, drinking wine, sharing stories of Jesus with one another, praying, enjoying the company of one another in faith and love. I felt my heart drawn into the Body of Christ, past, present, future and recognized myself to be part of that.

It was a very visceral and vivid experience of being drawn by God that engaged all my senses and reminds me to this day of what that pull of God feels like, even when I don't feel it so powerfully.

Sister Julie Vieira, IHM