



And just like that, the trees here in the Midwest of the United States are explosions of color. Reds, oranges, yellows and greens in every shade. I celebrate this time of the year as fall is always close to my heart.

I began the month of October by riding a trail deep in the Oak Openings region of Ohio. This is a rich bio-diverse area – wet meadow, swamp, flatwoods, sand prairie and barrens, and oak savanna.

The wildlife flourishes here, from the deer bounding across the trail in front of me to the wild turkeys calling at me from the brush to the blue jays darting overhead.

This is not only one of my favorite places to bike, but it is also one of my favorite places to pray. There is a deep calm and wild in the woods that sometimes is the only key that can unlock my heart, especially when the world around me feels so turbulent.

I often ride alone, yet always I feel the presence of the community. Sometimes we ride together, sometimes we each go our own paths, sometimes we post our experiences in a shared social media group. We encourage one another, commiserate with one another in the falls, and celebrate the small and big victories, and always rejoice in the beauty of this place.

Though beautiful, the trail is not without challenge. There are literally ups and downs, sandy patches, tight turns, rocks and fallen branches, and even a few volunteer-built obstacles to make things even more interesting! Whether I ride through unscathed or end up with a few bumps and bruises, I feel the pulsing of life and the breath of God in it all.

For me, it seems a fitting parallel to the spiritual life: the ups and downs, the natural beauty, the community, the wild and calm, the community and the presence of God. I often reflect on this and find insights to carry with me when I am off the trail, negotiating the winding path of my daily life.

And for you, what places and experiences unlock your heart and give you pause? In what ways is God calling to you in these moments?

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