

Compost and the interior life

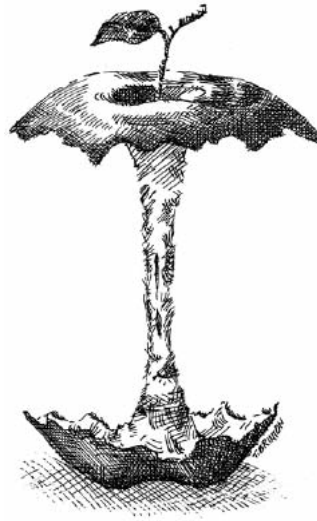
By Jane O'Shaughnessy, RSCJ

In the mid-nineties, while a member of the newly formed Associates group in Boston, I began to consciously weave my own spirituality into the framework of Sacred Heart spirituality. I was intrigued by the concept of the interior life. Mary Quinlan, RSCJ, who was dedicated to Society history and to our fledgling group, wrote, "As greatly as Mother Barat esteemed formal prayer, she once said that interior life is more than prayer, by which she meant that the constant recollection of God's presence at least through an obscure awareness throughout the activities of the day was of major importance in the development of prayer."

Madeleine Sophie Barat was raised in rural France, a vineyard keeper's daughter, and was lovingly attuned to nature. She wrote, "An interior person is like a sunflower, always turning toward the Sun of Justice to receive its radiance."

In our day, this radiance of God in nature, is a theme deepened by the writings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The French Jesuit integrated his scientific understanding of evolution with his religious understanding of the "divine milieu," the immanence of the divine continually creating and uniting our world. Teilhard helped shift our consciousness of a personal interior life to knowing ourselves as being interconnected and interdependent within an evolving universe. Our interior life abides within what we now understand as the interiority of the universe.

When we in the U.S. Province last gathered as an assembly/chapter in 2007, we voted to endorse the Earth Charter, joining "a global partnership to care for Earth and one another." The preamble states "Earth, our home, is



alive..." In that endorsement, we committed our spiritual journey to a deepening awareness of the integrity of creation.

My relationship with God developed, as one's does, through my personal and unique experience. During my Earth Mother phase, raising two little girls on 20 acres of land with wild blueberries, gardens and farm animals, my apple core went into the pile of aging horse manure to decompose, and then be turned back into the soil to feed the strawberry plants. Composting very simply became a part of my

life. This natural act is a compelling alternative to tossing vegetable waste into the trash. Plastic bags filled with garbage produce toxic gases that poison the earth, air, water. For me, composting is a spiritual practice.

I have seen, in poorer areas of our world, garbage burning in piles on the streets because there was no other option. And I have read of trash being barged around the world in search of a dumping ground. These realities weigh on my heart and call for a response. Trusting in the interiority of the universe, I know that a small act locally makes a difference globally. Following nature's course of integrity – even on so basic a level as composting – is an act of solidarity, reconciliation and justice.

In this age of ecological planetary crisis, we learn from Earth, our home. And, like the sunflowers, we can turn and open to full participation in co-creating a new Earth. ✦

Jane O'Shaughnessy, RSCJ, has served as a spiritual director at the Spiritual Ministry Center in Ocean Beach, California, since 2006.