

Our Inner Pilgrimage
By Christine Loughlin, OP

Darkness descends now in the late afternoon. The electric light is lit in the Distribution Center for the garden members who come at the end of their work day to pick up shares. The bins contain root crops sweetened by the cold. Most surface plants have succumbed to the early morning frosts. The compost is piled high with harvested stocks, shredded and covered with leaves. Sweet rot permeates the whole yard. Death is tangible.

A garden invites us to notice the seasons. There in the flat arm of our Milky Way galaxy, whirling in the company of sister planets, we make our yearly pilgrimage, 590 million miles around our sunstar. As the movement swings the northern hemisphere away from the radiance of warmth and light and we face into the cosmic night, we humbly recognize we are children of our sunstar. All life is a gift of the sun. The plant "kingdom" gives testimony in winter's dying back. Technology insulates us from this great Truth as we turn on the electric light in the Distribution Shed.

Imagine ourselves planetary pilgrims! Remember the band from literary antiquity. In Chaucer's *Tales* 24 pilgrims, a tailor, a friar, a knight, a cook, a miller set out to visit the shrine at Canterbury. Chaucer wrote what he saw and heard in the lives of the travelers. In his breakthrough in literary art Chaucer discovered that atonement and healing happened on the inner journey that each experienced in the company of fellow pilgrims.

Today's newspaper reads that we ready the bombers for war; that thousands perished in mudslides where a forest once absorbed the rains. A science writer reports the planet lost almost one-third of its natural resources and animals between 1970-1995; that the human pressure on natural resources is growing at a rate of 5 percent annually. We sense the great failure of the human venture. On the other hand we see hints of recovery everywhere, pilgrims journeying toward new insights.

Ancient peoples noticed and attended to the sun's passage with unceasing care. They understood their dependence on the generous radiation of our bright star. They engineered monoliths in precise arrangement to capture that miraculous moment when the sun was born again. Collective observation over the centuries taught us that Earth dances in gravity's spin. Today's technology acts like giant eyes and ears. We see and hear that we not only travel our yearly pilgrimage around our star but move in the great cosmic expansion of space/time. We are cosmic pilgrims!

Today's crises offer us a choice. We are the once in a lifetime human species with the opportunity to go on pilgrimage through one of Earth's most historic turning points. If we dare into the inner darkness of our human psyche "we will see the great light" of a new revelation and come into a time of unparalleled fulfillment. May we companion one another in this great work as we ritualize the mystery of our death and rebirth at the Winter Solstice.

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And what are the standards set for this sunlight that has been promised us?

That it be clear.

That it be freely given.

That it fall on everyone at the same time.

That it open our hearts of darkness.

That it illuminate the caves under the landfast ice.

That it give solar power to angels.
That it rise instantaneously over the rim of the southern mountain.
That it burst like floodwater down the fjord.
That it set alight and inflame the broken ice at the shear zone
That it repair and mend our angry, flaccid little hearts.
That it ignite the plankton under the sea ice.
That it make the poppies flare and glitter on the stone tundra.
That it bring the huskies out from under the staff house.
That it draw the birds forward on their great migrations.
That it signal the caribou of the dwindling Ungava herd,
that they shake themselves and prepare to cross the rapids of the Kuujuuak.
That it turn on cloud-shadows over the opening seas.
That it awaken love and foxes.
These are the standards of sunlight.

Source unknown