

Hoping to be noticed

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June 13, 2014

Years ago I was very good at hope. I could hope for a more celebrated position, flatter abs, or to cross the finish of Ironman. I was also good at setting goals to achieve these ends: I put my head down and knocked them off.

The elation of accomplishing these goals and garnering a little attention for my efforts was a great high, but unfortunately it did not usually last long. The momentary stability and well-being I felt would soon slip away like every sandcastle ever built on every coast: God of the wind, rain, and waves eventually levels all.

This was as true of my spiritual life as it was of other aspects of my life. I wanted to excel spiritually as well as physically. I wanted spiritual attention just as I wanted physical attention. Who does not want to be noticed?

[As I have attempted to walk in the path of a Benedictine oblate](#), I've realized that even truly humble monastics struggle with wearing their spirituality around their necks like an Olympian wears a medal. The real issue, I've learned, is a surprising one. It isn't giving up our hope to be noticed; that is deeply human.

Instead, it is learning to receive the incredible notice that the Divine has given every human being. Many of us fail to feel noticed because we fail to notice our own wonder and we fail to love this wonder. This is a paradox. All of my attempts to receive human notice hinder my ability to perceive the attention that is already being poured on me by the Divine.

The kind of hope we cultivate when we start to pay attention to this divine generosity is different than the other kind. It doesn't try to protect its little sandcastles against the wind and waves. It opens the doors and windows wide and runs to the shore. It marvels when the wave crosses the entire ocean and belly flops with an undeniable "ka-slam," knocking you over and then pulling with an unstoppable force—a force that carries so many particles of your sandcastle to distant lands.