If you look at what you have in life, you'll always have more. If you look at what you don’t have in life, you'll never have enough.”—Oprah Winfrey

“When we are stunned to the place beyond words, we’re finally starting to get somewhere. It is so much more comfortable to think that we know what it all means, what to expect and how it all hangs together. When we are stunned to the place beyond words, when an aspect of life takes us away from being able to chip away at something until it’s down to a manageable size and to file it nicely away, when all we can say in response is ‘Wow,’ that’s a prayer.” —Anne Lamott, Help, Thanks, Wow (73)

“You sanctify whatever you are grateful for.”—Anthony De Mello, SJ

O Lord, you have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away. You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. / Wonderful are your works; / that I know very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! I try to count them—they are more than the sand; / I come to the end—I am still with you.

—Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18

Questions for discussion:

➢ Do you make time for “wow” in my life? If not, what prevents you from doing so?
➢ Who is a person that “wows” you? What qualities and attributes do you admire about them? How do you feel when you encounter this person?
➢ What are the words, feelings, and/or experiences that you associate with “wow?” Do these words/feelings/experiences feel “holy?” What is your reaction to Anne Lamott’s idea that “wow” is a prayer?
➢ The author of Psalm 139 writes about being “wowed” by God, who is in turn wowed by the psalmist. Consider for a moment that God is wowed by you. How does this truth sit with you?
➢ What is one concrete way that you might practice “wow” during this season of Lent?

For further prayer & action:

• Spend some time each day this week praying the words of Psalm 139. Read these words slowly and reflectively; make them your own. As you pray, imagine that God is being wowed by you.
• Take a few moments each day to be wowed (see back for further instructions). Offer a prayer of gratitude for each wow you experience, and consider whether the wow calls forth any particular response in you.
• Spend some time reflecting on a person in your life who wows you. Take some time to make them a gift and/or write them a short note explaining what you admire about them. Share your work of art and/or words with this person.
Ignatian Winter Workout Group, Week 2—Making Space for “Wow”

Featured prayer practice of the week: Savoring

Gratitude is central to Ignatian Spirituality. Through the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius invites the retreatant to practice gratitude. He does so using a very specific word: savoring. He writes, “For it is not knowing much, but realizing and relishing things interiorly, that contents and satisfies the soul” (Second Annotation). The word relishing is a translation of the same word that means to savor. Fr. James Martin, SJ describes the connection between savoring and gratitude.

Gratitude is...necessary to counteract our normal human tendency to accentuate the negative, to problem-solve relentlessly, to be hypervigilant about our troubles. This habit, behavior psychologists say, is simply part of our prehistoric brains, which naturally evolved to help us be alert to danger. In other words, while it would have been pleasant for the cave-dweller to enjoy his (or her) meal, it was far more important for him (or her) to be on the lookout for a predator. Thus, we naturally focus on the negative, thanks to evolution.

To paraphrase Jerry Seinfeld, “Not that there’s anything wrong with evolution.” But while our brain’s hard-wiring is good for pointing out signs of danger, it’s not so good at letting us enjoy what we have. So gratitude takes work. Savoring is an antidote to our increasingly rushed lives. We live in a busy world, with an emphasis on speed, efficiency and productivity, and we often find ourselves always moving on to the next task at hand. Life becomes an endless series of tasks, and our day becomes a compendium of to-do lists. We become “human doings” instead of “human beings.” Savoring slows us down.¹

Br. David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk, has written and spoken prolifically on the topic of gratitude. His TED Talk on gratitude has been viewed over 6 million times. He sees gratitude as a pre-verbal “wow” welling up within us that eventually overflows into what he calls “thankfulness,” which he understands to be the act of expressing thanks.² What he describes is essentially the Ignatian practice of savoring. He suggests three simple steps to practice wow:

1. **STOP:** make time—even a short amount of time—to slow down and “stop and smell the roses.” Busy-ness works against gratitude. It is only when we stop and give ourselves time that we can begin to be thankful. Even a short pause can make a huge difference

2. **LOOK:** once we have stopped, we then are able to pay attention. Once you’ve stopped you can consider: What do I see? What do I hear? What do I smell? How do I feel? For what am I grateful?

3. **GO:** After noticing something for which to be grateful, you are confronted with a choice: How will I respond? Perhaps you feel called to say or do something in response to the gratitude that is welling up within you. Give yourself time and space to consider how you want to respond to wow.

Try making some time this week to practice these three simple steps. If you journal, jot down some thoughts and/or reflections about what you experience as you practice “wow.”

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² For more of David Steindl-Rast’s thinking on gratitude, listen to his OnBeing interview: https://onbeing.org/programs/david-steindl-rast-anatomy-of-gratitude-dec2017/