

Sr. Margaret Dorgan's Weekly

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IT'S BLUEBERRY SEASON

All of August is Wild Blueberry Month as proclaimed in solemn fashion recently by our state's governor. These are weeks to appreciate another of God's wonders so generously bestowed on us. According to the Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine, our territory is the No. 1 producer of the flavorful, sweet fruit not only in America but in the whole world. Yes, we can be proud of living with this genuine aristocrat--a real blue blood! "Let all Your works give you thanks, O Lord, and let your faithful ones bless you" (Ps 145:10).

As I bend over to rake our wild blueberries, they are a delight to the eyes. And now to the taste as I take a sample. I won't rake too fast. I pause a bit to relish what is before me and to admire what God has created in this small beautiful creature.

Its history is long, going back thousands of years. It has a special place in our state's annals. Native Americans knew its value and esteemed the special flavor and healing qualities given it by the Great Spirit. It provided nourishment in summer and autumn and was dried for winter consumption. "For you shall eat the fruit of your handiwork. Happy shall you be, and favored" (Ps 128:2).

On a sunny day, not too hot, when the morning dew has evaporated, the berries are beckoning. Theirs is a quiet voice that speaks of God in a variety of ways. Spread out wide--vivid blue and green by gray tree trunks, below white clouds in the sky--the crop invites us to esteem its ample expanse. Let the blueberry speak to me about growing in a terrain that demands acid soil. In my own life, I often must adjust to an acid input that I cannot avoid. I will remember the lowly blueberries and ask my Savior to help me grow and ripen in this difficult emotional sod.

Through all of August and into September, the crop ripens. It appears in fields and barrens from Downeast to the southwest corner of Maine. It flourishes with the right proportions of sun and rain. Growers would like a perfect balance in these weather changes just as we would in our own maturing. We ourselves must at times make our way through dark and fog-ridden hours and like the berries we persevere.

How often we complain while the sun is hidden in our lives. Oh, the humidity! Where are the bright rays and fresh breezes? When trials, some foreseen and some unexpected, intrude on our days, we know the divine Harvester is at work in the field of our life. Then the sun becomes too hot. Stretches of drought test our faith. Yet this dryness contains elements of maturation for us. We can be growing even when we are aware only of losing ground. Our God comes in every psychological change to give us new self-understanding. Oh, round succulent fruit, you arrived at this beauty through many weather fluctuations.

In 1882, Abijah Tabbutt of Maine devised the first blueberry rake. The state's initial commercial harvest took place in the 1840s. That market now brings in more than \$75 million annually and the berries' fame is spreading around the world. The claims for their health-giving properties seem to increase with every new research project. They top the list for natural antioxidants. Oxidation in our bodies is something like rust on metal; it damages cells and advances the aging process. Blueberries can boost protective protein in the brain and help combat pain caused by inflammation. All this and a marvelous taste! "Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving" (Ps 147:7).

Step carefully through those fields after getting permission from the owner. Your fingers pluck the berries or you use the much faster rake. Let your lips acclaim the bounty that extends before you. "May my mouth speak the praise of the Lord, and may all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever" (Ps 145:21).

For people busy with demanding tasks, boxes of blueberries are on sale along our roadsides. Every Maine person can share a favorite recipe for pie, cake, muffins, pancakes, and so much more. "Let hearts be merry with every berry/ That speaks of Maine in accent plain,/ Or mixed and sweet, it can't be beat."

As you carry the berries home, few or many, pray in your own words. You could also repeat the lines of the Psalmist, "**O Lord, Your kindness reaches to heaven; your faithfulness to the clouds. The children of men and women ... feast on abundance.**" (Ps 36:6,8,9).

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