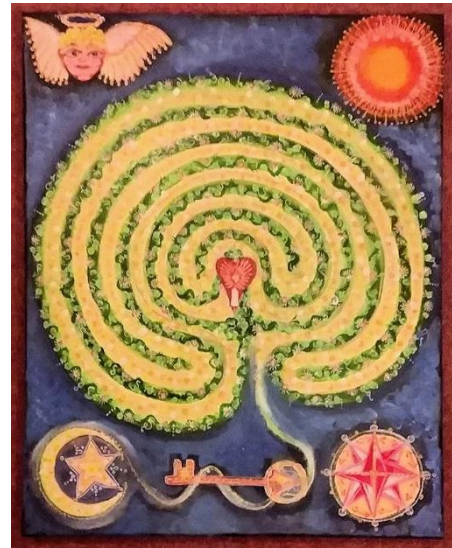


Joyful Mysteries

I am most known in the world for my work with labyrinths, so those who know me will not be surprised to learn that the labyrinth symbol is often the lens through which I see – and make sense of – the world around me.

Like praying the rosary, labyrinth walking is a spiritual practice that connects my feet (literally and metaphorically) to a path leading towards a centre where I go in search of divine connection. There are many designs of labyrinths, but the most common definition is a meandering path with no dead ends that leads to a centre. It is a container for imaginal experience that holds the walker while allowing time to slow down on what quickly becomes a familiar path. The path – no matter how familiar we may consider it – offers a different experience each time it is revisited. The path is never the same twice! The story changes as we change, as we wind through the days and seasons of our lives.



Sound familiar? I pick up my rosary beads to pray each day.

Often I walk, praying in rhythm with my footsteps, following the Pathway into the Garden where I go to meet Our Lady. Starting with my statement of belief, a Creed of my choosing, I start up the beads of the path. In my mind's eye I enter the gate then go around in an imaginal arc that encircles a garden, pausing at each of the Mysteries to retell the stories and explore their relevance to my own ever-evolving story, then praying the Hail Holy Queen as I enter my imaginal centre, where the conversation gets real as I talk to my Mother.

The labyrinth, like the rosary, holds me in my own fullness and truth. I am fascinated by what I think of as *quotidiennes* – the little daily practices and acts that shape our lives. The labyrinth and the rosary are containers for my experience, my story, and my faith. The labyrinth pathways act as a partition that sets apart a sacred space, and walking the labyrinth provides a break in normal activity and attention, potentially affording an opportunity to notice and attend to whatever is within, and a place to connect to the Divine.

I love new beginnings and fresh starts. We are called to action, and creativity stirs so that action can be taken. In labyrinth walking, there is only one decision to be made: to enter or not. Once across the threshold, there is a surrender to the path. As our feet follow the pathway, we are free to wander internally. One step at a time, we make our way to our goal. With the rosary, we make our way one bead at a time. One prayer, one story, at a time as we traverse the garden and arrive at communion.

Did you know that you can step aside during a labyrinth walk? Or cross lines, even jump directly to the centre... what matters is that we come. I pick up my rosary, and the same leniency holds true. Most of the time, I follow the beads around – but sometimes I don't. I get interrupted and need to step aside. Or I fall asleep and wake up much later clutching my beads, feeling that I've been truly resting in a Holy Garden, with Momma's arms around me. What matters is setting out. Stepping onto the path, surrendering to it, one step – one bead – at a time.

Artwork: Sara Bennett

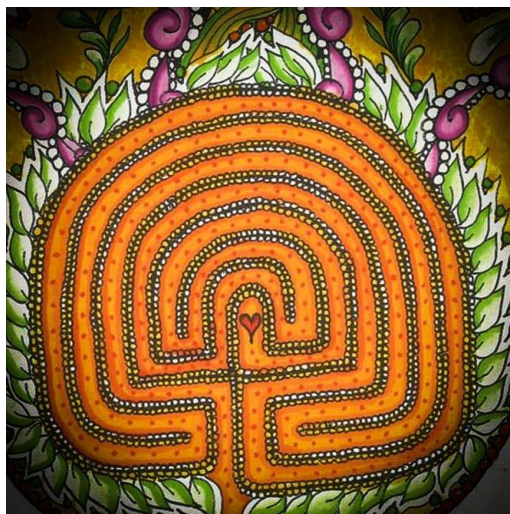
Sorrowful Mysteries

The Sorrowful Mysteries offer me a succession of mirrors for looking into my own behaviours and motives – actually all of the mysteries function like this, but as I move around and around my beaded circles, it is these that particularly invite me to an examen of conscience. Where do I participate in behaviours I decry and outwardly deplore? Where do I drift off to sleep, where do I look away, where do I mock...?

There is a lovely outdoor labyrinth in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The paths are lined with symbolic images and artefacts to suggest moving through the ages, through the universe, illustrating evolution. Walking it some years ago, I absolutely surrendered to the path, the story, and the imagery. Lost in thought I rounded the final turn and gasped when a mirror situated at the centre greeted me with my own reflection. This is a theme that others have used in various settings, including one set up at a church festival a hundred years ago in England that greeted guests with a decorated mirror and a moralistic poem. For those brave enough to look, we meet our deepest and most expansive Self when we arrive at the centre of both the labyrinth and the rosary.

In moralistic labyrinth contexts, we are intended to see the monster that resides within us, the Minotaur if you will. But in the Santa Fe labyrinth, I saw my potential – where I was heading superimposed on a reflection of how I appear in the world. I could see my beauty as well as my faults. I like to think that is how we appear when we pray through the Mysteries and enter into conversation with a Mother who knows us so well that she can hold our fullness, where we are both enough and never too much.

The centre can hold us, with all our imaginings, fears, longings, and hopes. Both centres invite us to attend to our imaginal experience, to the images of our stories and the whisperings of spirit. Many, but by no means all, labyrinths are in garden settings, so that our feet can naturally connect with the earth as we walk. For me, praying the rosary and walking the labyrinth are earth-based practices that lead me home to my Mother.



Artwork: Sadelle Wiltshire

Glorious Mysteries

At its most basic, the labyrinth is a spiral. I tend to think of my rosary as a circle rather than a spiral, but when I hold my inner imagery up to the light, I see can see its spiralling underpinnings. As we go through the Mysteries, a new story is poised to begin even as the old one is still ending. In therapy sessions we talk about human experience as spiralling so that even as we repeat old patterns, we approach them from new directions so we can gain new perspectives until something finally shifts so that change or growth can occur. Mary is crowned with the roses of our prayers and stands vital and young again, ready for the story to start anew. Each time it starts it is fresh, never quite the same on the next telling.

The Glorious mysteries take me beyond my understanding. I search for stories that will give a context for things that I can't explain. A resurrection, an ascension, an assumption - all are beyond my ken, and because they surpass my understanding, they hold the door open for new potential, new beginnings and imaginings, fresh hope. As a labyrinth researcher, I often see people's frustration at not being able to pin down specifics like the precise history and origin of the oldest labyrinth, or what it might have meant to its creator. The labyrinth has a long but vague history that encircles the globe and weaves with subtle grace through the ages of mankind, and it confuses us by appearing complex but then leads us forward with step-by-step simplicity. Like the rosary, the labyrinth, too, offers an experience of Mystery.

In this age of technological prowess, there is not always space for the unknown, for Mystery. Archaeological evidence illustrates the grasp the labyrinth has held on our collective imagination for more than four thousand years. The labyrinth is an archetype, a potent symbol whose existence transcends boundary, crossing both time and culture with ease, being found around the world and throughout history. Its pathways invite introspection and – for many – prayer. Whether I walk the labyrinth with my feet and body or with my fingers on a piece of paper, or even with my eyes on a drawing or carving, the labyrinth offers to hold me and contain my story.

I don't use the labyrinth and the rosary interchangeably. The labyrinth offers me a template while the rosary offers me a devotion and invites me into relationship. The practices merge and mingle; they support and expand within me as the days go on. I walk and I pray. I pray and I walk. I spiral. I cross lines and miss words, connect and disconnect, but I come back again and again, in daily-ness. I show up.



Artwork: Sara Bennett