

I Happened To Be Standing

by Mary Oliver

I don't know where prayers go,
or what they do.
Do cats pray, while they sleep
half-asleep in the sun?
Does the opossum pray as it
crosses the street?
The sunflowers? The old black oak
growing older every year?
I know I can walk through the world,
along the shore or under the trees,
with my mind filled with things
of little importance, in full
self-attendance. A condition I can't really
call being alive.
Is a prayer a gift, or a petition,
or does it matter?
The sunflowers blaze, maybe that's their
way.
Maybe the cats are sound asleep.
Maybe not.

While I was thinking this I happened to
be standing
just outside my door, with my notebook
open,
which is the way I begin every morning.
Then a wren in the privet began to sing.
He was positively drenched in
enthusiasm,
I don't know why. And yet, why not.
I wouldn't persuade you from whatever
you believe
or whatever you don't. That's your
business.
But I thought, of the wren's singing, what
could this be
if it isn't a prayer?
So I just listened, my pen in the air.