

# 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.

"I Happened To Be Standing" by Mary Oliver from *A Thousand Mornings*.