Emmanuel

Eucharistic Spirituality

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Eucharist and the Care of Creation

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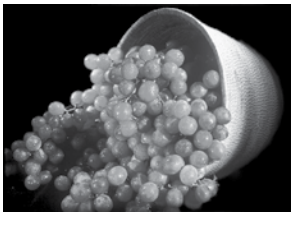
Emmanuel Magazine

Seeing all of reality in the light of the Eucharist

Volume 126 Number 3



FROM THE EDITOR

It is commonly believed that the first encyclicals of a papacy represent a signal of the pastoral vision and priorities of the new pope. Other leaders in the Church, then, as well as the faithful and secular observers look to these documents to see what the holder of the Chair of Peter will emphasize in his apostolic ministry.

Laudato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home), issued five years ago, in May of 2015, was the second encyclical of Pope Francis' papacy, the first being *Lumen Fidei* (The Light of Faith) in 2013.

The encyclical opens with these words: "'*Laudato Si', mi' Signore' — 'Praise be to you, my Lord.*' In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. 'Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.'"

True to the saint whose name he chose on election, and reflective of his birth on a continent so often exploited ("ravaged," the Holy Father says) for the mercantile interests of colonial powers and the needs of newly-reemergent nations and economies, *Laudato Si'* is an impassioned appeal to care for and protect God's creation.

Others, far more knowledgeable than I, will offer reflections on the care of creation elsewhere in this issue. My point here is simply to underscore that the Holy Father's vision of our shared responsibility as stewards of creation is eucharistic.

Pope Francis writes in *Laudato Si'* paragraph 236:

> It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds

> its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became (human) and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living center of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God.

In a Church like ours, with a highly developed sacramental imagination, God is revealed in word and ideas, yes; but also, in created things like bread, wine, and water. 

Anthony Schueller, SSS
Senior Editor

In This Issue

In this issue care of creation is explored through a eucharistic lens. Liturgist Gil Ostdiek, OFM opens up the ecological dimensions of the presentation of the gifts in his article Care of Creation: A Eucharistic Call to Action. Scripture scholar Dianne Bergant, CSA offers a reflection upon the meaning and consequences of the biblical notion of humanity made in the "image of God." John Christman, SSS presents a unique Orthodox vision of care of creation. Michael DeSanctis reflects upon the role of creation in shaping Catholic sacred spaces. Julie Tragon offers a practical guide for living out the vision of *Laudato Si'* in a parish setting. While Martha Ligas and James Menkhaus offer a beautiful reflection upon eucharistic contemplation derived from nature and poetry.

Care of Creation: A Eucharistic Call to Action

by Gil Ostdiek, OFM

How does the presentation of the gifts during the celebration of the Eucharist challenge us to care for creation?

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"I DON'T WANT YOUR HOPE. I WANT YOU TO PANIC," SHE SAID, " I WANT YOU TO feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act." Simple words, a cry from the heart of a teenage girl spoken bravely to CEOs and world leaders at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Her name is Greta Thunberg, *Time Magazine*'s 2019 person of the year. She rallied millions of young people to strike on behalf of our fragile planet's endangered climate. A strike that is still spreading ripples around the globe in a school strike for climate ("Fridays for Future") movement among school children.

Where do we adults hear that same challenge confronting us to care for creation? Strange as it may seem, it happens in every celebration of the Eucharist. Just stop and attend to the simple ritual of presenting the gifts, often given little attention as we quiet restless children or fish for something for the collection. Yet that simple ritual contains a wealth of meaning for us to ponder in today's climate crisis. It calls us to action.

Presenting Gifts of Bread and Wine

This ritual action of presenting bread and wine leads us from the Liturgy of the Word into the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Why do members of the assembly bring up these gifts in a formal procession to present them to the presider? It would be more practical for a server to bring them to the altar from the sacristy. But this procession is something we have inherited from the early Church. At that time, everyone was expected to bring bread and wine from home. A deacon then selected and presented what was needed for the celebration. What was not needed for the celebration was set-aside for the poor.

Today people do not bring the gifts. Instead, the parish staff usually procures the gifts, and only a few of us present them at the altar. Yet, the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (no. 73) tells us, the spiritual significance for us remains. What spiritual meaning does this have for us? The familiar blessing prayers the presider proclaims give us clues. We'll focus first on the blessing for the bread, pausing to reflect on each phrase.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you …

Bread is a gift we have received from a God whose lavish goodness to us knows no bounds. This God of all creation is not some distant, disinterested creator. The psalmist exclaims in wonder that God is mindful of and cares for us mere mortals (Psalm 8:4-9). Presenting the bread acknowledges that it is God's gracious gift to us; we can only offer what we have already received from God.

… *fruit of the earth* …

Bread is the gift of the good earth God has created. Earth provides cereal grain for flour, salt, yeast, water, fuel for baking — everything needed to make bread, a daily staple to sustain human life. The symbolism runs deeper. As John's gospel theologically envisions, grain must fall into the ground and die to yield a life-giving harvest (John 12:24), mirroring Christ's life-death-life pattern for our life of discipleship, of self-giving. How tragic it is to withhold that gift of nourishment and life from others by inequitable consumption or embargo. How tragic it is to withhold it by radically altering the climate, turning fertile soil into scorched earth or waterlogged fields that can yield for others only hunger or even death instead of life. We owe everyone, in the words of poet Pablo Neruda, "the justice of eating."[1]

… *work of human hands* …

Bread bears the imprint of many hands — farmers who plant and harvest it, those who transport it by truck, train or barge, millers who make the flour, bakers, grocers who stock it, check-out clerks. But all their work depends on even more human labor — the work of fabricating the implements they use and the factories to build that equipment. Bread is not the product of only a few hands, but the condensed symbol of all our labor. In bringing bread to the altar, we acknowledge that all who have a hand in making it deserve to be fed by it. We pledge to leave behind our complicity in withholding it

from others and to again take up our calling to cooperate with God in making our fertile world life giving for all.

… *it will become for us the bread of life*.

Only God who created our life-sustaining world can transform bread in this final life-giving way. Jesus our Emmanuel said, "the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world" (John 6:51). And on the night before he died on the cross for us, as he gave bread to his disciples, he said, "this is my body which is given for you" (Luke 22:19). Life given, even in death that others might live. This is the life-pattern for all disciples.

We turn now to the gift of wine we bring to the altar along with the bread. What is the meaning of that? The blessing the presider says for the wine again gives us a key.

Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you …

This blessing proclaims that wine is also a gift we have received from God. A provident, extravagant God of the galaxies who also delights in making, "plants for people to use, to bring forth … wine to gladden the human heart" (Psalm 104:14-15).

… *fruit of the vine* …

Wine is the fruit of grapevines. It is a gift we also receive from God's good earth and its atmosphere mantle. Soil, nutrients, moisture, temperature, and sunlight are all important to the quality of this fruit of the vine. The first fruit of the vines is grapes. They will become wine only by a further process of transformation at our hands.

… *work of human hands* …

Like bread, wine is also a gift of human work, the work of many hands — all those who plant, tend, and prune the vines, who pick the grapes, who transport them to the winery, who press the grapes and add yeast to activate fermentation, who bottle the wine and oversee its aging, who transport the bottled wine to retailers, who ring it up at the counter. As in the case of the bread, each of these workers require equipment and buildings for their part in the labor. Like wheat, grapes

also have a price to pay: giving themselves up to become wine for us. Only when that wine is poured for family and guests in gladness and welcome does it reach its human destiny. Wine, too, bears the imprint of many hands and lingering traces of shared lives and relationships, and ultimately the world itself. All that is what we present at the altar. In so doing, we pledge to be true to God's call to shape that world into a place of peace, harmony, and joy for others.

Bread is not the product of only a few hands, but the condensed symbol of all our labor. In bringing bread to the altar, we acknowledge that all who have a hand in making it deserve to be fed by it.

… *it will become our spiritual drink*.

This is the final transformation of the wine we present. Just as his ancestors did, Jesus took the cup of wine after the meal and spoke a blessing. That blessing announced a new covenant sealed in the wine-become-his-blood. "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). Only God can bestow this blessing, this final gift. And the price of that giving was Emmanuel pouring out his life for the salvation that gladdened and blessed the many. That was accomplished on the cross, often depicted in medieval hymns, sermons, and iconography as a beam weighing Jesus down in a "mystical winepress" from which the wine flows.

In a Dialogue of Gifts

In a broader perspective, presenting bread and wine can be called a "dialogue of gifts" between God, nature, and humanity. It is one moment in a larger cycle, or better a spiral, of gift-giving-receiving. God is ultimately the giver at work in the entire process — 1) creating the world, 2) giving it the capacity to yield bountiful materials that can be fashioned into food and drink, 3) endowing humans with the amazing ability to actualize that potential and transform those earthly elements into actual food and drink to nourish and sustain human life and community, and 4) then completing that process, by transforming bread and wine into spiritual food and drink that draw us deeply into the love and life of God. A gift far beyond what we humans can provide by ourselves.

Creation responds to these gifts with its own gift of praise and thanks to God. In the canticle of the three young men, standing unscathed in the fiery furnace into which they have been cast, they call on all creatures, inanimate and animate, to praise and thank the Lord (Daniel 3:52-90). In the *Canticle of the Creatures* Francis of Assisi issues that same call to all creatures to praise and worship the Lord (quoted by Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* 87). Creatures do this by being true to what they are: "all you [God] have created rightly gives you praise" (Eucharistic Prayer III). It is given to us humans to freely join the chorus of creation, "giving voice to every creature under heaven" (Eucharistic Prayer IV). We are privileged to consciously include the gift of ourselves in that offering of praise and to join in Christ's own gift of himself to God, as "we offer to you in thanksgiving this living sacrifice of praise" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

God is at work in every phase of this dialogue, but earth and humans are privileged to collaborate with God who keeps all creation in existence. We are co-workers not only with God, but also with the world of nature. We are part of the web of all creation. We are dependent on the world for the gift of food and drink we need to sustain our very life. We humans are dependent on one another to provide that food and drink. We are children of earth, bound together genetically with one another and all creation in a great chain of interdependence and sustenance. Created by the same God and formed of the same earth elements, all creatures are in a sense sisters and brothers to each other. We should care for all of them.

Presenting the gifts calls us to a eucharistic life style of thankfulness for every gift God gives, of becoming gift-givers to others, and caring for them in turn.

It is only right, then, that we should be bound together in a great dialogue of receiving and giving gifts. Experience tells us that the best gifts are not the things we give. It is the underlying gift of self, going out of ourselves to serve others for their life and well-being. In reality the dialogue of gift is a "dialogue of love." That is what presenting bread and wine tells us. God is present and made known to us in all creation and most especially in the self-gift in love made by the one who became flesh and lived among us.

But there's a double glitch in the dialogue. In our waywardness we are often tempted to focus on the wrong thing — on the gift rather than on the giver and on ourselves rather than on all those for whom the gift is given. It's easy to greedily grasp God's gift of creation and selfishly claim it for ourselves alone. After all, we're the ones who made the bread and wine. We're the ones who can turn the rich resources of this earth to our own advantage. So why should we have to thank God for them or share them with others? In this way we reduce the dialogue of gift to mute silence, we make creation too opaque to reveal the presence and self-gift of God.

Presenting the gifts, however, tells us there's a way forward. The blessings we reflected on above invite us to resume the dialogue that our sinfulness had silenced. They jar us out of our selfish use of all God's gifts, and the end of each blessing calls us to a different response.

We are children of earth, bound together genetically with one another and all creation in a great chain of interdependence and sustenance. … we are privileged to collaborate with God who keeps all creation in existence.

… *Blessed be God forever*.

To bless God means to offer our thanks and praise, acknowledging God as their giver. The gifts of earth and its fruits of bread and wine are again freed from their silence and given a voice to tell us about the loving God who is present to us and totally self-giving. We acknowledge their giver and restore them as the symbols they are meant to be (theologians speak of this as the sacramentality of creation). All creation had been groaning to be set free from the bondage of our doing and to be redeemed along with us (Romans 8:19-23). Through the gift of human labor, earth and its fruits are taken up into the praise and thanks we now present to God as our return gift. In the Eucharistic Prayer we will then ask that the many-layered gift we have presented — bread and wine, our work, our world, and ourselves — may be transformed into a sacrifice of praise and thanks, along with Christ's gift of himself. It is indeed right to gather up our world and all our work in this offering of thanks and praise to God.

A Eucharistic Call to Action

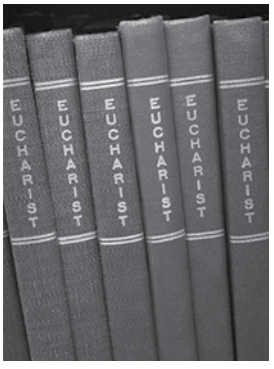
Presenting the bread and wine invites us to take up the challenge Greta Thunberg issued. That simple ritual action reminds us again and again that we are part of creation, that bread and wine, and indeed all creation, all our work, and our very selves, are gifts we receive from God. It calls us to respond in ways such as these:

- to see all creatures as manifestations of God's goodness and love;
- to treat all creatures, inanimate and animate, with respect and the dignity they deserve;
- to cherish and care for our planet, God's gift and our common home;
- to protect the habitat and needs of all creatures that are at risk;
- to work with nature to provide for the sustenance and well-being of humankind;
- to treat all human beings with justice and respect for their God-given dignity;
- to join the hymn of all creation in praising and thanking our creator God.

To bless God over the gifts of bread and wine we present at the Lord's table is nothing other than a great act of thanks-giving. That is what Eucharist is all about. Presenting these gifts calls us to a eucharistic life style of thankfulness for every gift God gives, of becoming gift-givers to others, and caring for them in turn. It calls us to a eucharistic spirituality that leads us to a life of love and self-giving in imitation of God's own self-gift as our Emmanuel. That is what Eucharist calls us to do.

Notes

[1] Pablo Neruda, excerpt from the poem "The Great Tablecloth." Cf. Pablo Neruda, *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems*. Bilingual edition. (San Francisco, CA: City Light Publishers, 2004).



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

Image of God: Icon or Idol?

by Dianne Bergant, CSA

What does the biblical tenet of the human person made in the "image of God" teach us about our relationship to creation?

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THE UNIVERSE THAT SO FASCINATES THE HUMAN SPIRIT? WE TURN to the sun during the day looking for warmth and reassurance, and to the night sky in wonder and awe. We have always been challenged by its immensity, captivated by its power, thrilled by its grandeur. Down through the centuries, many have believed that the mystery of their future is somehow hidden in the position of the stars. It is no wonder that celestial bodies have frequently been thought to be somehow divine. The way we understand the cosmos has always influenced many of our religious perceptions.

Evidence of this celestial influence can be traced throughout the history of scientific discovery. Pythagoras' insistence that Earth[1] is a sphere and not flat challenged literal belief that God is enthroned in the heavens above us. Copernicus' heliocentric model of the universe further threatened well-established concepts of divinely determined human dominance in the universe. Darwin's insight into evolutionary processes disputes the notion of the direct creation of humankind. These revolutionary scientific discoveries or theories have challenged time-honored religious understandings of how God works and of the place of human beings in creation. Over time many of these theological understandings have been corrected or reinterpreted. However, correction or reinterpretation has not come easily.

We face such a scientific revolutionary situation today. Contemporary cosmologists speak of an evolving universe, one that was not competed in six days of creation, regardless of how one might perceive the meaning of the six days spoken of in the Bible's creation narrative. They insist that there are actually multiverses containing billions of galaxies, some of which, no doubt, contain planets that

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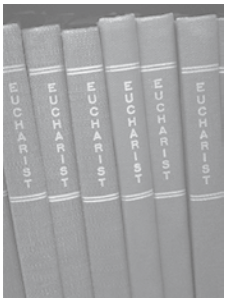


are able to support life. If this is the case, how are we to understand the Bible's claims of human superiority? How are we to reconcile the findings of contemporary science that is cosmocentric with the religious message of the Bible which is so obviously anthropocentric and which appears to be based on an ancient understanding of the universe that is fundamentally anthropocentric? This is the challenge placed before us today.

In 1967, Professor Lynn White, Jr. published an article in the magazine *Science* entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis." In it, he laid much of the blame for this crisis at the doorstep of the Judeo-Christian tradition, specifically Western Christianity. He maintained that: "By destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects."[2] He went on to state, "modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental [Western], voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's [sic] transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature."[3] Even today he leaves the religious reader with a soul-searching challenge: "What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man [sic]-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."[4]

In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis denounces what he calls tyrannical, distorted, or misguided anthropocentrism (*LS* 68, 69, 119, 122). By this he is referring to a prevailing point of view that sees humankind as the center of all created reality and the measure according to which all else is to be evaluated. Such a perspective has little concern for other creatures except to the extent that they are useful in advancing human goals. This way of thinking has often been legitimated and reinforced by a literal reading of the creation narrative in Genesis 1, where human beings appear to have been created godlike and commissioned by God to "subdue the earth and have dominion over the fish and the birds and every living thing" (cf., Gen 1:26; 28). A closer look at this narrative will offer us a very different view of humankind's place in natural creation.

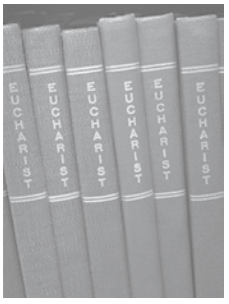
Image of God

In the first creation account (Gen 1:1-2:4a), the fundamental character of the human couple and of their subsequent commissioning is found in the expression "image of God" and in the twofold commission

"subdue" and "have dominion" (vv. 27-28). In the ancient world, people fashioned images of their gods. The images were not considered the gods themselves, but were simply representations of the power and authority of the gods, power and authority that was actually jurisdictional. Thus, when in Egypt, one was under the jurisdiction of Egyptian gods; when in Mesopotamia, under Mesopotamian gods; etc. This explains the religious trauma experienced by people when they were exiled from their land, the land of their god. Their religious identity was challenged by such an upheaval. Aspects of this practice of setting up images were not unlike the way we revere national flags, which are symbols of the jurisdiction of the power and authority of the nation. While it is true that in the ancient world, the images as symbols of power and authority often came to be valued as idols that actually possessed some form of divine power, this does not seem always to have been the original intent.

Since this is how images of gods functioned in ancient times, then to say that the human couple was made in the 'image of God' is to say that they were meant to represent where and how God exercised power and authority. Though they were not themselves divine, there was always the great temptation, as was the case with material images of gods, to begin to think of themselves as somehow divine. In fact, Genesis 3 tells us that this was precisely the sin of the first couple. They were not satisfied being 'image of God,' following God's directives and representing where and how God is sovereign. In the narrative, the serpent argued: "God knows well that the moment you eat of it [the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad" (v.5). In other words, being 'image of God' is not enough when you might have the opportunity of being like a god. The serpent suggested something very attractive, and the couple chose to follow that attraction. This sin was certainly one of disobedience. However, the underlying reason for the disobedience was hubris, which is understood to be excessive pride toward or defiance of the gods.

A passage from the book of the prophet Ezekiel, condemns the same kind of hubris. There we read that the prophet reinterpreted elements of the Genesis story of sin in his condemnation of the prince of the ancient Phoenician city Tyre. The prince's successes in trading led him to think too highly of himself. This excessive pride resulted in violence and exploitation:



> Because you are haughty of heart,
> you say, "I am a god!
> I sit on a god's throne in the heart of the sea!"
> But you are a man, not a god;
> yet you pretend you are a god at heart!
> Ezek 28:2

His hubris led to his downfall:

> Then, face to face with your killers,
> will you still say, "I am a god"?
> No, you are a man, not a god,
> handed over to those who slay you.
> Ezek 28:9

There are other aspects of the metaphor "image of God" that are pertinent here. In the ancient world, kings and queens were looked on as being somehow divine. (This explains why the establishment of monarchy was initially a religious threat to the sovereignty of the God of Israel.)[5] The major myths of origin addressed the human need of securing the stability of the world and of society. The domain of the gods and societal reality were regarded as so interrelated that human kingship usually played some role in the cosmic drama. For the Egyptians, whose experience of life was established by the regularity of the Nile, kingship was an essential part of the structure of creation. The activity of the creator found its natural sequel in the absolute rule of the pharaoh. The pharaoh's absolute rule was legitimated as an exemplification of the activity of the creator. In fact, the creator Re often headed the lists of Egyptian kings as the first ruler of the land, and each successive pharaoh was regarded as the divine Horus reincarnated.

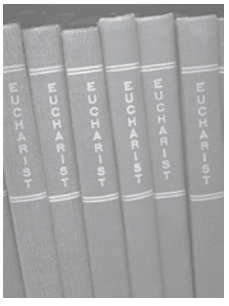
The extant literature of Mesopotamia provides us with a very different picture. In addition to the regular seasonal cycles, Mesopotamia had to withstand disruptive elements in nature. This fact is reflected in its cosmogonic traditions. Water, principally from the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, was often turbulent and threatening rather than predictable and beneficial, as the Nile River. For this reason, it became a symbol of chaos.[6] The principal Mesopotamian myths depicted a violent struggle between competing divine powers resulting in a benevolent god's victory over chaos and the establishment of order in the universe. In these traditions, the triumphant god was portrayed as a warrior and designated king. Only after the cosmic victory does

creation take place.

The Mesopotamians did not seem to regard divine kingship as a natural concomitant of an ordered pantheon. Instead, it was seen as a way of dealing with confusion and anxiety among the gods. Correlatively, natural and socio-political crises forced them to subordinate themselves to a human king. Although they did believe that kingship descended from heaven, they did not perceive it as a divine reality. Unlike the Egyptians who regarded their pharaoh as a god, Mesopotamians viewed their king as a mortal endowed with a singular responsibility. Since it was the gods who bestowed this charge of governing, the same gods could remove it from the reigning sovereign at any time and bestow it upon another.[7] Clearly the Israelite notion of monarchy resembled the Mesopotamian view more than that of Egypt.

Ignorance of or unwillingness to acknowledge the limitations of human governance over the natural world may be at the heart of much of the arrogance many people exhibit today in their attitudes toward the rest of creation.

Since "image of god" came to be understood as a royal designation, it is clear that the creation narrative in Genesis 1 casts the first man and woman in the guise of king and queen. Furthermore, "subdue" and "have dominion" is royal language, indicating that the monarchy was responsible for subduing dangerous chaotic situations and for exercising dominion over the realm. Bringing all of these insights together, we can see how the ancient Israelites incorporated aspects of ancient Near Eastern royal ideology into its own understanding of monarchy, though they eventually reinterpreted these aspects to fit their own monotheistic faith. The monarchy did indeed have a special relationship with God;[8] it did act as agent of God in a certain way. However, this relationship did not bestow divinity on the monarchy. As images of God, Israelite royalty were ambassadors of the sovereignty of God. They were commissioned to subdue or bring order into chaotic situations, and to exercise dominion over all that existed in their realm, which included all aspects of natural creation. However, they were to act as God would act; they were to guarantee the flourishing of creation, not cause its exploitation. Finally, they were to do this remembering that "the earth is the LORD's and all it holds" (Ps



24:1) and that all creation was valuable because the creator saw that it was all "very good" (Gen 1:31).

When we read this creation account in this way, we discover that human beings are not autonomous sovereigns of the natural world who were granted a license to exploit the earth or tyrannize other creatures, as a literal reading has sometimes claimed. Instead they were issued a mandate which included serious responsibility for the world of which they were a part, and accountability to the creator for the governance of that world. This way of reading the creation narrative challenges any kind of tyrannical, distorted, or misguided anthropocentrism. Ignorance of or unwillingness to acknowledge the limitations of human governance over the natural world may be at the heart of much of the arrogance many people exhibit today in their attitudes toward the rest of creation. Many still want to "be like God," boasting unconditional authority and unlimited control over other people and over the rest of nature. Temptation to hubris is ever present.

Conclusion

A distorted anthropocentrism claims that human beings are more than they really are. An accurate anthropology recognizes that human beings are not divine, fully and autonomously in control of everything else, as an inaccurate perception of the couple in the Genesis account might have supposed. Such human limitation in no way diminishes the magnificence of human reality. Women and men are images of God, agents of God's care for creation. The biblical narrative of the image confronts distorted anthropocentrism by challenging our desire to be more than we have been created to be.

Notes

1 Many ecologists today think of Earth (with a capital E) as a subject with rights and privileges, rather than earth as an object totally dependent on human beings.

2 Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (1967): 1205.

3 Ibid., 1206.

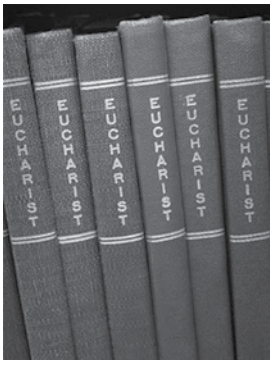
4 Ibid., 1206.

5 "…they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Sam 8:7b).

6 Besides the narrative of the flood (Gen 7:6-24), the Bible has many references to unruly waters (Pss 29:3; 46:4; 124:4; Mark 6:28; etc.).

7 The prince of Tyre would be an example of such a ruler.

8 Through the prophet Nathan, God tells David that his heir will have a special relationship with God, not unlike the father-son relationship thought to exist in royal monarchies of the day: "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me" (2 Sam 7:14).



EUCHARISTIC TEACHINGS

John Zizioulas and the Priesthood of Creation

by John Christman, SSS

Influential Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas proposes that humanity's proper role in relation to the universe is as "priest of creation." What does he mean by this and what are the implications?

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* had its official public release in Vatican City on June 18, 2015. The experts invited to speak at this important press conference were few: a leading Catholic Cardinal overseeing issues of justice and peace, a scientific expert on "climate impact research" and John Zizioulas, theologian and Orthodox Metropolitan of Pergamon.[1] To those familiar with Zizioulas, his inclusion was no surprise. Not only has the Orthodox tradition led the way in drawing Christian attention to ecological concerns, but Zizioulas himself has made the "care of creation" a central component of his theological writing for decades. The inclusion of Zizioulas witnesses to an ecumenical dimension of Pope Francis' ecological vision and shows that the work to be done is in continuity with, and builds upon significant work already begun in the Orthodox tradition.

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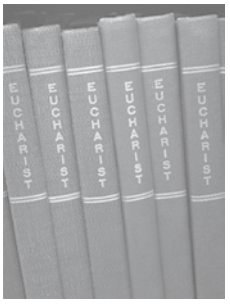
Priests of Creation

In Zizioulas' erudite and concise statement at the *Laudato Si'* press conference he brilliantly wove together key elements of his own theological work pertaining to creation along with important points of convergence with Pope Francis' encyclical. The following excerpt from his statement introduces many of his primary concepts and concerns:

> In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Church offers to God the material world in the form of the bread and the wine. In this Sacrament space, time and matter are sanctified; they are lifted up to the Creator with thankfulness as His gifts to us; creation is solemnly



> declared as God's gift, and human beings instead of proprietors of creation act as its priests, who lift it up to the holiness of the divine life. This brings to mind the moving words of St. Francis of Assisi with which the Encyclical opens: "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth." As St. Gregory Palamas and other Greek Fathers would put it, the whole of creation is permeated by God's presence through His divine energies; everything declares God's glory, as the Psalmist says, and the human being leads this cosmic chorus of glorification to the Creator as the priest of creation. This way of understanding the place and mission of humanity in creation is common to both Eastern and Western Christian tradition, and is of particular importance for the cultivation of an ecological ethos.[2]

Here in just one paragraph Zizioulas makes the connection between Eucharist, creation, the human person, and the unique role of humanity. He does this referencing an idea he has developed over many years, humanity's mission as "priest of creation."[3]

Contemporary theological conversations examining the relationship between humanity and creation are commonplace. Central to these conversations is the desire to name this relationship. Is it one of dominion? Is it one of stewardship? Both find biblical and cultural precedence. However, both are problematic and have been unable to properly address our current ecological challenges. Zizioulas believes that this is in part due to the fact that these concepts presuppose a way of acting instead of a way of being. That is, they presuppose an "ethic" and not an "ethos."[4] As Zizioulus states, "In the case of stewardship our attitude to nature is determined by ethics and morality: if we destroy nature we disobey and transgress a certain law, we become immoral and unethical."[5] Not only has this "ethic" proven to be insufficient motivation for change, but it fails to understand humanity's deeper relationship to God and creation. Thus Zizioulas believes we need, "Not an ethic, but an ethos. Not a programme, but an attitude and a mentality. Not a legislation, but a culture."[6]

Drawing from this observation the theological understanding he then proposes is both ontological and liturgical. That is, it proposes a notion of being and a particular role for humanity within the unfolding of salvation history. For Zizioulas, this is best articulated by identifying

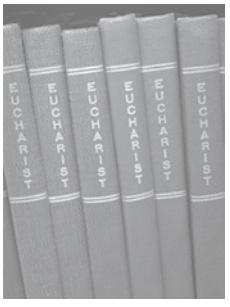
humanity as the "priest of creation." He explains:

> The priest is the one who freely and, as himself an organic part of it, takes the world in his hands to refer it to God, and who, in return, brings God's blessing to what he refers to God. Through this act, creation is brought into communion with God himself. This is the essence of priesthood, and it is only the human being who can do it, namely, unite the world in his hands in order to refer it to God, so that it can be united with God and thus saved and fulfilled. This is so because… only the human being is united with creation while being able to transcend it through freedom.[7]

There is an incarnational, sacramental and existential dimension to this understanding. Recall the words the priest prays over the gifts as the water is poured into the wine during mass, "By the mystery of this water and wine may we come to share in the divinity of Christ who humbled himself to share in our humanity." Here the incarnational and sacramental dimensions are acknowledged in the course of the prayer as we recognize that Christ took on our humanity that we might share in his divinity. Sacramentally, especially through baptism, confirmation and Eucharist, humanity is welcomed by Christ into communion with what we are not, namely the divine. Humanity, in a manner unlike the rest of creation, is offered a unique relationship with God.

On the other hand, Zizioulas is strong in his emphasis that humanity is completely part of creation. This is an important point. In terms of physics and biology the human person does not stand apart from creation. Instead, humanity is part of the evolutionary development of the universe. Thus as human beings we are part of creation. We are not its "proprietor" or "steward." We do not stand outside of creation. We are part of time, space, and matter. Humanity lives and dies with creation.

Unlike the rest of creation, however, humanity possesses a self-conscious freedom and longing for transcendence. Humanity longs for something beyond the confines of space and time. We desire to escape death. We desire to create new and unforeseen things. We create cultures and shape our environment. Zizioulas likens this quality of the human person to the artist. The creative dimension of the human person sets humanity apart from creation in many ways. But our freedom and desire for transcendence has consequences. When



separated from a relationship with God this freedom and longing for transcendence focuses inward on the self. Humanity attempts then to lift itself into the place of God and uses creation to it's own ends often with negative consequences. In this view creation is not seen as having it's own intrinsic value. It is not seen as a gift. And it is certainly not seen as awaiting it's own salvation as Saint Paul describes in Romans 8:23. Instead it is simply raw material at the service of humanity. The sense of the sacred is lost. As Zizioulas laments:

> In our Western culture we did everything to de-sacralise life, to fill our societies with legislators, moralists and thinkers, and undermined the fact that the human being is also, or rather primarily, a *liturgical* being, faced from the moment of birth with a world that he or she must treat either as a sacred gift or as raw material for exploitation and use. We are all born priests, and unless we remain so throughout our lives we are bound to suffer the ecological consequences we are now experiencing. We must allow the idea of priest of creation to re-enter our culture and affect our ethos. For, an ethic which is not rooted in ethos is of little use to ecology.[8]

Thus we see humanity's unique role as being in relation to God and being in relation to creation. As "priest of creation" we are all called to recognize the many gifts of creation and draw them into sacred communion with God. We are called to have a loving attitude towards creation and help bring about its fulfillment. Our continued being is connected to the continued being of our world, and its salvation is united with ours. To not be in proper relation with creation then is deemed an "ecological sin."[9] Moreover, what is required of us in Zizioulas' estimation is a type of "ecological aestheticism" which shapes right relationship with creation. This entails respectful "co-existence" with other creatures, thoughtful "restraint in the consumption of natural resources," and society's dedication of "technology and science" to the care of creation.[10] In this manner of being humanity properly expresses its nature and mission as "priest of creation."

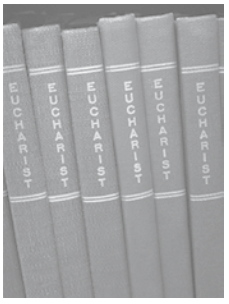
The "Priesthood of the Laity"

Since the Second Vatican Council much has been said about "the priesthood of the laity." Whether from the documents of the council itself (*Lumen Gentium*), or influential theologians like Yves Congar, or

in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, this unique "priesthood" of the laity has been discussed. Often this notion of priesthood is rooted in Christ who is identified as priest, prophet and king. Scripturally speaking, when we turn to the gospels, we find that these are not names or ideas which Jesus himself frequently uses or applies to himself. Nevertheless, they are terms traditionally applied to Christ and have significant historical meaning. When these three categories of "priest, prophet and king" are used to speak of the unique vocation and mission of the laity, however, it is not uncommon to find more energy given to distinguishing the roles of the clergy from that of the laity. It almost seems that the authors are more concerned about articulating what the laity are not, especially in relation to the priesthood, rather than articulating what they are. In such an ecclesial climate and presentation one wonders how meaningful these categories are to the average layperson. After all, being defined by what you are not and being told, in a general sense, that your mission is to the world, may do little to validate or inspire.

Father Brian Mullady O.P. offers a broader reading of these three terms in order to make them more applicable, suggesting instead, "worship (priest), witness (prophet), and service (king)."[11] This may be laudable in some sense since kingship can appear antithetical to more democratically minded societies. "Prophet" understood in the biblical sense applied only to a select few chosen by God and recognized by the people as such. And the priesthood, as it is lived out, sometimes exhibits marked tendencies towards clericalism and disconnectedness. "Worship, witness, and service" may speak more meaningfully then to a vast majority of Catholic Christians. However, one can't help but wonder if the laity would choose to identify their role and mission in such a manner.

If we delve deeper though, the nomenclature of "worship, witness, and service" presents different problems. "Worship, witness, and service" emphasize what it is we *do* as Christians. They are, in a sense, an "ethic." One of the great challenges in American culture today (and in many instances western culture) is the reduction of the value of the human person to what a person *does*. For example, a typical question encountered when introduced to someone is, "what do you do?" Value is reduced to one's ability to perform actions. This often takes on an economic association, relating degrees of value based upon one's ability to earn. The dilemma often reaches an existential crisis when people are faced with retirement. If they have consciously or



unconsciously placed their sense of self-worth and identity in what they *do*, ceasing that activity can lead to a profound crisis. People may find themselves asking, "Who am I, and what is my worth if I am no longer *doing*?" The Christian response to this is the conviction that dignity and worth come not from *doing* but from *being*. Every human being has intrinsic value because they are created and loved by God. Zizioulas helps us not forget this essential Christian truth. In fact, for Zizioulas it is a Christian ethos that must shape our ecological understanding. This is where the "priesthood of creation" may find allure. It is because of the unique nature of the human person, at once in communion with God and creation that being and mission are united. This can be seen as validating and ennobling. It presents a positive view of the human person and could provide substance to a common-shared priesthood that the laity may find meaningful and relevant to the ecological challenges of our time. Zizioulas puts it beautifully:

> We do not ask people to respect the environment simply for negative reasons, such as the fear of destruction, etc. — this would be an ecology based on fear. We ask people to take a *positive* view of ecology, something like an attitude of *love* towards nature. As priests rather than as stewards we *embrace* nature instead of managing it, and although this may sound romantic and sentimental, its deeper meaning is, as we stated above, ontological, since this 'embracing' of nature amounts to our very being, to our existence.[12]

Notes

1 https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/06/expert-calls-the-science-behind-the-papal-encyclical-watertight/

2 http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/metropolitan-john-zizioulas-laudato-si-give-orthodox-great-joy/ accessed January 9, 2020

3 John D. Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*. Ed. Luke Ben Tallon (New York, T& T Clark, 2011) 133.

4 Ibid, 174.

5 Ibid, 139.

6 Ibid, 174.

7 Ibid, 137.

8 Ibid, 141.

9 http://fore.yale.edu/news/item/metropolitan-john-zizioulas-laudato-si-give-orthodox-great-joy/ accessed January 9, 2020

10 Ibid.

11 https://www.simplycatholic.com/priesthood-of-the-laity/ accessed January 11, 2020

12 Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World*, 140.

EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

Topiary, Aviary, Bestiary, Breviary: An Organic Reading of Church Architecture

by Michael DeSanctis

What do our great church buildings tell us about our relationship to creation?

Our Mechanized Environment

The Swiss-born Modernist architect LeCorbusier (1887-1965) is credited with having inspired several generations of architects throughout the world to regard their art as one aligned with the mechanization of human life, something akin to the business of boilermakers or automobile designers but on a larger scale. Indeed, it was "Corbu," as he was widely known, who proposed as early as 1923 that the very homes in which people dwell should serve as "machines for living in,"[1] a conceit that has come to be embodied everywhere in the human-made corners of the "Common Home" Pope Francis chose recently to assess in his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. The global scene laid out in the pope's instruction is one filled with techno-mechanical wonders of all kinds that together form the "framework" through which modern men and women now judge their physical surroundings and, by extension, virtually every other aspect of their culture and themselves (*LS* 107). "Steam engines, railways . . . airplanes," the pope notes in chapter three of his encyclical, along with more recent, "chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology . . . robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies" (*LS* 102) contribute to the environment we have succeeded in assembling for ourselves in the space of decades, only to find our psyches exhausted for having to run at a constant 2,500 RPMs. Far from serving as a sacrament of our communion either with nature or with nature's creator (*LS* 9), our Brave New World has turned out to be a vast and complex techno-commercial mechanism that affects our daily lives at every turn.

A trip to the local outpost of any large supermarket chain in this country nicely illustrates the point. Upon situating our cars in the expanse of

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asphalt that surrounds such a place, we encounter a carefully planned sequence of approach experiences that includes banks of automated doors and a welcoming blast of warmed or refrigerated air whose daily quotient of electrical energy must be immense. Making our way to the store's produce section, we find ourselves surrounded by fresh and pre-packaged foods from every corner of the globe, all attractively displayed in cases self-monitored for optimum temperature control and furnished with hidden LED devices that emit a glow as alluring as the sun's but more constant. At regular intervals throughout the day, the mist-making arteries strung through those cases containing leafy plant-foods add to the magic by releasing a dose of controlled precipitation with no hint of human intervention. Machines of one kind or another likewise fill out the bakery, the meat and seafood departments. At the checkout counter we place our purchases on a mechanical conveyor belt and entrust the mathematical part of our transaction to a network of barcodes, laser scanners and touchscreen calculators. Not surprising is the frequency with which such a scene leaves us feeling a little like the hapless Everyman portrayed by Charlie Chaplain in the classic movie, Modern Times (1936), caught between the jaws of a giant, soul-devouring machine over which we have little control.

The Catholic Place of Worship as an Antidote to Global Mechanization

While some Christian groups in recent decades have been eager to transform their places of worship into temples of high technology indistinguishable from their commercial surroundings, the Catholic Church persists in maintaining an approach to sacred architecture more reliant on the lessons of nature and intimately related to the organic quality of the Body of Christ. To Catholics, of course, the Church itself is a kind of organism, a perpetually flourishing sign of the presence of Christ in the world. It is no coincidence that the look and feel even of its most contemporary places of worship reflect a preference for the "florid"— a quality not related solely to the employment of flower-based embellishments but measurable in the frequency with which decorative references to nature and natural materials themselves hold a place of importance in their design.

In fact, the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (*GIRM*) prescribes materials derived from natural sources such as, "wood, stone and metal (*GIRM* 301, 326)," as opposed to the synthetic imitations of these that have become so commonplace. Such products of the earth endure,

notes the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States in its guidelines for liturgical art and architecture (*Built of Living Stones*, 2000) and possess an aura of the same mystery and transcendence (*BLS* 161) we recognize in ourselves. There is something elemental and archetypal that attracts us even implicitly to the feel of clay in our hands, to the fretting of wood grain, or the sheer age and density of stone. Catholic artists are encouraged to explore all of these as means of differentiating the place of divine encounter from the workaday environments filled with simulacra we have come to accept as "the real thing." The setting for Catholic worship fails as "a machine for praying in," as someone like LeCorbusier might have defined it, for the simple reason that there is nothing mechanical about the personal or corporate journeys of those who inhabit it, even less about the ways in which God behaves in their lives. The Catholic church building is not a "grace factory" in which salvation is dispensed in some assembly-line fashion but a garden tended by Christ himself, Eden-like in its splendor, where souls are cultivated within the fertile ground of word and sacrament. It is no coincidence that the great monastic churches of the world are so often constructed with a cloister garden in their shadows, a symbolic remnant of Eden, from whose center often rises a great evergreen, a stand-in for the Tree of Life described in Genesis (2:9).

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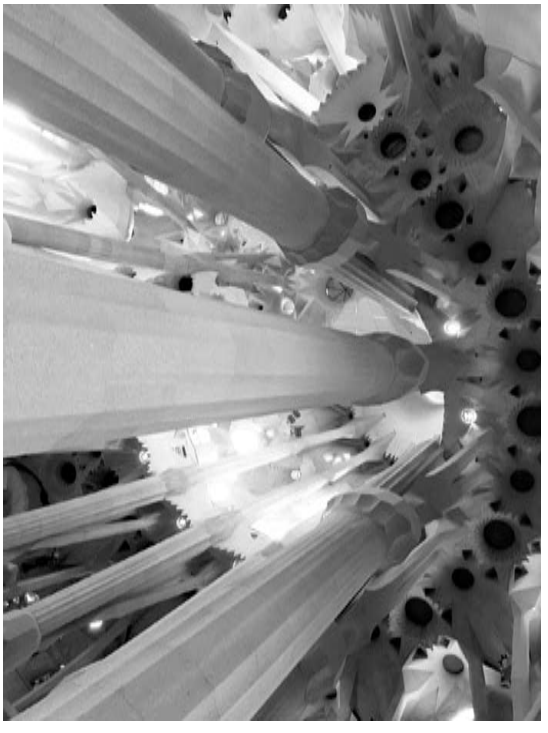
On a metaphorical level, in fact, the Catholic place of worship has long functioned as a surrogate for a natural enclosure of one kind or another that offers the soul a combination of protection, rest and nourishment. To enter even the lowliest of Catholic churches has been to pass into a "second womb," the belly of the great fish described in the Book of Jonah (1:17), or the hollow of some mysterious cave. Often, one's approach to it is slowed by an elevated grade and an apron of stairs that together succeed in changing one's step, making one pause, and causing one to consider the profundity of what lies within its walls. To cross its threshold — as concrete a gesture of "liminality" as one can imagine — is a deliberate act of the will. Except in those cases when provision is being made for the elderly and disabled, the doors at its ceremonial façade are not automated. Instead they are oversized to announce the

significance of the building they serve and hang too heavily on their hinges to be breezed through in the way one slips into a convenience store. One must struggle a little to open them and, while doing so, is made to recall that it is really Christ through whom believers must pass, the one portal and gateway of salvation (John 10:9), in whose name the Church opens its places of worship to the world. In many parish settings today, a baptismal font or pool on axis with the altar awaits visitors close to the doors through which they enter.

References to nature are impossible to miss at a place like the famous *Mariendom* (1963-68) pilgrimage church in Neviges, Germany, designed by Pritzker Award-winner Gottfried Böhm (b. 1920), a spikey mountain range-of-a-building with multiple exterior faces made of reinforced concrete. The same is true of Antonio Gaudi's breathtaking *Basílica de la Sagrada Família* (construction begun 1882) or any of Europe's great Gothic cathedrals, "enchanted forests" built of stone, whose ceiling ribs resemble the boughs of trees, their columns great trunks. The play of light and shadow within such places also mirrors what one encounters by journeying into a wooded area, where a canopy of leaves high overhead affects how sunlight is received below (see front cover). Light is "dappled" in darkened buildings whose walls are pierced by windows and becomes prismatic should their glazing be colored in any way. To be sure, recent advances in artificial lighting technology have resulted in an "evening out" of the light one finds within the place of Catholic worship, a phenomenon that parallels what has occurred in the area of acoustical design for public spaces, which seeks to disperse sound evenly throughout a setting. Nevertheless, natural light, especially when admitted into a church building in some dramatic and "directed" way, remains a popular method for church architects to engage the religious imaginations of their clients — a fact affirmed by the number of churches constructed in the United States in the decades since Vatican II (1962-65) with roof spans broken by skylights or with walls made almost entirely of tempered glass, both of which have the effect of bringing nature into a place made by human hands.



Basílica de la Sagrada Família (Barcelona, Spain) interior columns

The Catholic Church Building as Microcosm of a Divinely-Created World

It might be argued that a Catholic church building is really a "topiary," an "aviary," a "bestiary" and a "breviary" all in one. It stands apart from the natural world only inasmuch as it protects its users from the threatening effects of climate and weather but succeeds through allusions of form or applied decoration in serving as a catalogue of earthly materiality as intriguing as any science textbook.

As a topiary (Gr. *topos* = "place"; L. *toparius* = "decorative garden"), the Catholic setting of sacred worship offers references to any number of plant forms, a common one being the grapevine, whose serpentine body and branches give visual expression to Jesus' claim of being the "true vine" (John 15:1) and his followers the "branches" (John 15:5) of his Church. The decorative flourishes applied to both the exterior and interior surfaces of many older churches include painted or sculpted versions of fruit and flowering plant-forms, often worked into swags, garlands, and wreathes (see inside back cover). Though the average Catholic might not appreciate it as such, the cross (or corpus-laden crucifix) itself, is the great "tree of life." It is the rod or "rood" made of wood the Eastern Church traces back to the garden in Genesis to which believers cleave, along with Christ himself, on the wood of the cross, so that, where death arose, life might again spring forth.

As an aviary, a Catholic church building offers its visitors references to every kind of bird imaginable. It is commonplace, for example, to find an image of an eagle incorporated into the design of its ambo, an ancient allusion to John the Evangelist and to the method by which one disperses the Word — like a great bird carrying its prey between its talons. Likewise, peacocks appear in the decorative treatment of many buildings, the eye-like tips of their feathered fan related to the all-seeing "Eye of God." Most Catholics will recognize the image of the dove as a longstanding reference to the Holy Spirit, an image that appears in baptisteries or hovering over sanctuaries. The breast-piercing pelican can also frequently be seen. Its likeness often adorns the fronts of tabernacles. Moreover, the forms of robins, blackbirds, finches, sparrows, and falcons, among other types of foul can be found woven into the decorative schemes of churches, reminders of some of the loveliest of nature's sights and sounds and of the magnitude of God's love for everything included in nature (Matthew 6:26-27).

As a bestiary (L. *bestia* = "beast,""animal") a Catholic place of worship is as much a menagerie of animal life as any museum of nature. There are, of course, numerous scriptural references to animals — creatures that walk or crawl or slither their way through the world — all of which lend themselves to artistic representation in one form or another. To some believers, the nave of a church building remains not only the great "ship" designed to transport its users safely to some celestial realm but a second ark on the order of Noah's famous vessel, vast enough to encompass all the members of a community as diversified as the Church. The very cruciform plan that underlies many churches has long been regarded as anthropomorphic, its chancel, transepts, nave and narthex spatial equivalents to the human head, arms, abdomen and feet respectively.

As a breviary of sorts, the Catholic church building serves not only as a place where the liturgical readings, psalms, and hymns of the day can be shared aloud but as a *text itself* capable of being "read" by its users. Its walls, floor, and ceiling planes may be said to be as impregnated with the words spoken within them over time as with the scented beeswax that arises from candles and the sweet or pungent fragrance of incense. It is not surprising that architects themselves often speak of the "grammar" of their art form or that various guidebooks continue to be written by authors eager to help the average lover of church buildings decipher the subtler meanings of architectural form. The great, American architect, Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) once confessed that the buildings of his native Boston "spoke to him" as a boy — a statement that, given the range of sounds structures can make as they settle, rack or otherwise fight the forces working against them, should not be taken entirely metaphorically. If, as Goethe asserted in the 19th century, "architecture is frozen music," then at least some of what the art form embodies is the Church's great hymnody and the hardened echoes of sermons and pastoral exhortations spoken from countless pulpits. To these are added the actual letter-forms and sacred texts applied by artisans in some circumstances to both the exterior and interior faces of churches and their windows. The scriptural reference to St. Peter's investiture spelled out in eight feet-high letters at the interior base of the great dome of the basilica in Rome that bears his name ("*Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam mean et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*;" Mt 16:18) is a good example of this, as is the catalogue of titles rendered in stained glass incorporated into the famous window at Chartres Cathedral depicting the signs of the zodiac and labors of the month.

Conclusions: Places of Divine Encounter and Their Sustainability

The particularity of place figures prominently in Pope Francis' *Ladauto Si'*, which argues that believers' "history of . . . friendship with God" plays out in settings where they can "recover something of their true selves" (*LS* 84). The Church does not allow its most solemn rites to unfold in surroundings that are mediocre or lacking in beauty but consigns them to buildings capable of helping it recover, from age to age, what might be called its *corporate* "true self." God alone "creates" and sanctifies places, of course, actions that, in the logic of *Laudato Si'*, have less to do with God inserting sites of special quality into the neutral realm of nature as with calling such sites into being *from* their natural surroundings—as a shipbuilder might command the timbers of a ship to assemble themselves into a vessel (*LS* 80). The permanence of such places remains an important consideration for the Church, which cooperates with God's creative-sanctifying action each time it vests its rites in a protective fabric of steel and brick and stone. Challenged by Pope Francis to be a more attentive steward of the planet's limited resources, however, the Church of the third millennium will likewise need to give proper import to the so-called "sustainability" of the sacred structures it erects (*BLS* 216), to wed them with sensitivity to their natural surroundings, and to uphold their role as places marked more by the enduring power of mystery than by the passing allure of any machine.

Notes

[1] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture* (London, John Rodker Publisher, 1931).

In Christ's Peace
Deceased Members

Most Reverand Roger P. Morin
Diocese of Biloxi

Since its inception, *Emmanuel* has published a list of deceased members of the Priests' Eucharistic League, remembering those who have served the church generously and faithfully and have passed into the promised eternal life. Priests in the Eucharistic League whose names begin with J, K, L, and M are asked to celebrate Mass for deceased priests during May and June.

EUCHARISTIC LITURGY

Living *Laudato Si'*

by Julie Tragon

Addressing the many issues Pope Francis identifies in Laudato Si' can seem like a daunting task. How can your parish begin?

Julie Tragon has been a pastoral minister in liturgy and music for over twenty years. She is a mom of three, a member of the Diocesan Liturgy Commission and finishing her MA in Theology from St. Mary Seminary and Graduate School of Theology in Cleveland, OH.

THIS PAST JUNE, I HAD THE PRIVILEGE OF BEING INVITED TO ATTEND *LAUDATO SI' AND the U.S. Catholic Church: A Conference Series On Our Common Home*. The gathering was the first of three biennial events, co-sponsored by Catholic Climate Covenant and Creighton University, designed to more fully integrate Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* across eight key ministries with the Church in the United States: advocacy, adult faith formation, creation care teams, energy management, higher education, liturgy, school education, and young adult ministry. As a longtime director of music and liturgy I was largely involved in the liturgy track. Inspired by my time at the conference, I have put together a comprehensive resource guide and outline for a year of parish programming in the areas of prayer, worship, catechesis, and social action related to *Laudato Si'.* It begins on May 24th 2020 (the 5th Anniversary of the Promulgation of *Laudato Si'*) and runs through May 30th 2021 (the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity). One of the things I have uncovered in my research and planning is that there is an endless pool of resources, ideas, and possibilities proclaiming love for God, neighbor and our common home as foundational to our mission as Catholic Christians. At times it can seem daunting, but don't let that deter you. Embracing even one of these ideas holds the possibility of creating a spark that ignites a larger flame within your community. In fact, if all you can do is take the time to read through and implement some of the ideas in this comprehensive resource created by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) entitled Caring for God's Creation: Resources for Liturgy, Preaching, and Taking Action: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/ecology-resource-all.pdf that would be a wonderful first step towards accomplishing the mission of *Laudato Si'*. Whatever you are able to do, it is important to point out that while

most people hear *Laudato Si'* and think only of creation care and climate change, the encyclical calls us to a much broader vision. It asks us to reconcile our relationship with God, the earth and with one another. Is that not the very message of Christ himself?

Laudato Si' 5th Anniversary Jubilee Year

May 2020

Sunday, May 24th 2020 – 7th Sunday of Easter or Ascension of the Lord – 5th Anniversary of the Promulgation of *Laudato Si'*

- **Mass** – Incorporate prayers and preaching focused on the themes of *Laudato Si'* (ex. our relationship with God, our neighbor, and the earth). End the Universal Prayer with A Prayer for Our Earth from *Laudato Si', 426*. Access a printable version here: https://ignatiansolidarity.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/A_Prayer_for_Our_Earth.pdf

June 2020

- ***Laudato Si'* Book Study** – Host a 4-week book study on *Laudato Si'.* Be creative by offering various days and times to accommodate more people and consider multiple venues then either purchase a book copy for each participant or have them access it in PDF form on a number of different websites. The USCCB has a great discussion guide that you can use to facilitate conversation: http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/environment/upload/laudato-si-discussion-guide.pdf

Thursday, June 18th 2020 – 5th Anniversary of the Publication of *Laudato Si'*

- **Taize** – Prepare a Taize holy hour incorporating prayers, scriptures, hymns and passages from *Laudato Si'* that highlight our interconnectedness with God, one another, and all creation. You are welcome to access, reproduce, and share the service I created for my parish community here: https://documentcloud.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn%3Aaaid%3Ascds%3AUS%3A1b55731d-b0e9-42fd-a9bd-c9f7845987df

Saturdays and Sundays in June – The *Laudato Si'* Pledge

- Encourage parishioners to commit to a year of living *Laudato Si'* by utilizing the *Laudato Si'* Pledge Tool Kit: https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B8pAZm1cjAhGZWY1cmpCcTJBWnM/view and have the parish, along with each individual and family sign the *Laudato Si'* pledge: http://livelaudatosi.org/ or

print pledge forms and cards here: http://livelaudatosi.org/pledge-forms/ and make them available before and after all the weekend liturgies.

Saturday, June 20th 2020 – World Refugee Day

- One way to draw out *Laudato Si's* theme of care for our neighbor is to focus on the many days throughout the Church year that focus on the poor and vulnerable of our world. Check out the following websites from the USCCB and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to find information about and to access, liturgical, catechetical, and action resources for commemorating World Refugee Day:
  -https://www.crs.org/get-involved/learn/world-refugee-day
  -http://www.usccb.org/about/resettlement-services/world-refugee-day.cfm
- **Walk/Run** – Host a 1-mile or 5k walk/run event within your parish or larger community as part of the United Nations Refugee Agency's (UNHCR) global initiative 1 Billion Miles to Safety: Every Step Counts. Find out more at https://stepwithrefugees.org/en-us/?utm_source=CAMP&utm_medium=web&utm_campaign=HQ_PI_EN_CAMP_stepwithrefugeesWRD
- **Outdoor Summer Concert Series** – Host an outdoor summer concert series (June - August) ending in an outdoor mass on your parish grounds. Invite the larger community. Features local musicians and begin with an inter-faith prayer in thanksgiving for the beauty of creation. (Consider using A Prayer for Our Earth from *Laudato Si'* - see first entry for a printable version)

July 2020

- **Launch "Sharing Stories" Series** – This series is primarily focused on utilizing social media (think websites, e-mail blasts, parish app, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, etc.) to share the stories of saints within the Church calendar whose lives are a witness to the themes within *Laudato Si'*. Begin with Saint Kateri Tekakwitha, Patroness of Ecology, on Tuesday, July 14th https://www.crs.org/get-involved/learn/resource-center/saint-spotlight-kateri-tekakwitha

August 2020

- **Adult Faith Formation Series on *Laudato Si'*** – This short 6-week video series (ranging from about 16 to 32 minutes each) on *Laudato Si'* is a great way to do adult faith formation on a Saturday evening or Sunday morning after or in-between Masses. It could also work after or in between daily Masses. Begin with a short prayer, play the video, and end with discussion questions. Consider adding some food sharing to create time for community building. This course was produced by the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) and Religions for Peace, in partnership with the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and features Cardinal Turkson, Jeffery Sachs, Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Dr. Anthony Annett and Dr. William Vendley. The videos for each class can be accessed here: https://catholicclimatemovement.global/online-course-laudato-si/

Friday, August 14th – Vigil of the Assumption

- **Outdoor Mass** – End your summer series with an evening outdoor Mass on parish grounds in celebration of the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. After Mass, consider having the parish music ministry provide additional music with summer refreshments for the whole community featuring local sustainable foods.

Saturday, August 15th – Feast of the Assumption

- **Launch "Let All Creation Praise" Series** – Along the same lines as the Sharing Stories Series, the Let All Creation Praise Series is a way to utilize social media throughout the year in order to cultivate and encourage the community to pray around the themes of *Laudato Si'* in new and varied ways. For example on August 15th: Queen of All Creation Prayer Video *(1m 52s)* https://youtu.be/G-qgaD31llc

September 2020

Celebrating the Season of Creation

- The season of creation runs from September 1st through October 4th. It begins with the World Day of Prayer for Creation and ends with The Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi. Visit https://seasonofcreation.org/ for more information and to access Season of Creation Celebration Guide and other valuable

resources.

- A really wonderful way to emphasize creation theology within the liturgy is to commit to audibly praying the prayer over the bread and wine ("Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation…") at all Masses from September 1st through Thanksgiving Day.

Tuesday, September 1st – World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

- **Mass** – With permission from the local Ordinary, adapt the liturgy of the day to highlight this celebration that was instituted by Pope Francis on August 6th 2015. Consider using appropriate Masses for Various Needs and Occasions in the Roman Missal and consult the Lectionary for Mass for the various Scripture readings assigned to these Masses. Use Preface V of the Sundays in Ordinary Time "Creation."
- **Prayer Vigil for the Care of Creation** – Hold a prayer vigil for the care of creation. Access a prepared service here: https://cafod.org.uk/content/download/29948/340910/version/15/file/Prayer_liturgy_prayer-vigil-for-care-of-creation.docx

Monday, September 14th – The Exaltation of the Holy Cross

- **Outdoor Stations of the Cross** – Visit a parish with an outdoor prayer path and outdoor Stations of the Cross, create your own outdoor stations, or bring some outdoor elements into your worship space to pray the stations indoors. Use this booklet produced by the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center: Stations of the Cross with All of Creation, available here: https://www.ipjc.org/stations-of-the-cross-for-all-creations/

September 17th – Saint Hildegard of Bingen

- **Sharing Stories Series** – In addition to sharing this "Saint of the Day" bio from Franciscan Media: https://www.franciscanmedia.org/saint-hildegard-of-bingen/, also consider sending out this reflection on Saint Hildegard's *All Creation Is A Song Of Praises To God* http://safcei.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ReflectionHildegard-von-Bingen-All-CreationPraises.pdf

Saturday, September 26th through Sunday, October 4th – Novena to Saint Francis For The Love Of Creation

- **Let All Creation Praise Series** – This novena to Saint Francis centers around Francis' Canticle of the Creatures. It was created as a way to spend time in prayer leading up to the 2019 Amazonian Synod but can be prayed in any nine-day-period. https://cafod.org.uk/Pray/Prayer-resources/Novena-to-St-Francis

October 2020

Sunday, October 4th – 27th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Respect Life Sunday and Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi

- **Mass** – Incorporate hymns, prayers and preaching that focus on the sanctity of all life, our care for humanity, and care for all God's creation.
- **Pet Blessing** – Utilize this comprehensive resource to create or enhance a blessing of animals in your community. https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/files/resource/attachment/FOSFblessing.pdf
- **Religious Education / Youth Ministry** – Celebrate the Feast of Saint Francis with your young people. Catholic Climate Covenant offers an annual resource (typically available a month prior to the Feast). You can access the 2019 Feast of Saint Francis Facilitators Guide here: https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/files/attachment/program/Facilitator-7.pdf?eType=EmailBlastContent&eId=636b489d-6359-4cc5-bb22-2b5f0bd14d43

Wednesday, October 7th – Our Lady of the Rosary

- **Let All Creation Praise Series** – Guided Rosary on Caring for Creation https://franciscanaction.org/sites/default/files/C4C%20Guided%20Rosary.pdf

November 2020

- ***Laudato Si'* Mini-Retreat for Youth** – Create a 2-3 hour mini-retreat for youth beginning or ending with a community meal. Depending on numbers and ages you can combine them into one large group or two smaller groups. For the younger children, begin with this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Avvx95p3rZo&feature=youtu.be. For the older youth, this one: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fj4WSTken3w&feature=youtu.be. Then create creation prayer stations using this resource: https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Creation-prayer-stations-for-YP-final-9115.pdf

Thursday, November 26th – Thanksgiving Day

- **Mass** – Incorporate prayers and preaching focused on the themes of *Laudato Si'.* Invite your community to bring forward nonperishable food and hygiene items during the presentation of the gifts and place them in the sanctuary for later distribution to those in need.

December 2020

Tuesday, December 1st – Giving Tuesday

- ***Laudato Si'* Project** – For Giving Tuesday, consider raising funds towards an ecologically minded project. Create a diverse local ecosystem by planting a wild garden on your campus or perhaps a community garden. Invest in new trash, recycle, and compost bins on your campus with clear instructions and signage to get the whole community on board. Discuss purchasing compostable paper products for events. Be creative, the possibilities are endless.
- **Advent Communal Reconciliation** – Incorporate an examination of conscience that focuses at least one section on "hearing the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*LS* 48) into your Advent communal reconciliation service.

January 2021

Friday, January 1st – Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God and World Day Of Peace

- **Mass** – Incorporate this Prayer for the World Day of Peace https://www.crs.org/resource-center/cry-peace-prayer-world-day-peace into the Universal Prayer. It can also be sent as part of the Let All Creation Praise Series.
- **Watch Party – *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word*** – Throughout the month of January, hold watch parties with the Focus Features film *Pope Francis: A Man of His Word*. You can ask parishioners to host small gatherings in their homes and/or you can host a viewing on campus with popcorn and refreshments for all ages. Create discussion questions appropriate for each audience and engage in group discussion after the film. You can access the film's homepage here: https://www.focusfeatures.com/pope-francis-a-man-of-his-word. It is available on DVD, Blu-ray and from various streaming sites.

February 2021

- **Lenten Fast for Creation Care – Ash Wednesday through Holy Thursday** – How often do we think of fasting from our mindsets and behaviors that hurt our common home? Challenge your community to fast from one aspect of consumption or waste (single use plastics, water or electricity

usage, food waste, etc.) during each week of Lent. For ideas and resources, Catholic Climate Covenant offers a Creation Care Corner that you can utilize for your bulletin or on your social media sites here: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kdyvitqni425fr4/AABOLQgkF8M7rbsLoxYjfv_5a?dl=0

Wednesday, February 26th – Ash Wednesday

- **Family Fast Day** – the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) has a family fast day that falls on Ash Wednesday in 2021. While the resources for 2021 are not yet available, you can visit their website to learn about the fast day for 2020: https://cafod.org.uk/Fundraise/Family-Fast-Day

Friday, February 28th – First Friday of Lent

- **Meatless Meal with Stations of the Cross** – Host a meatless meal for the community followed by Stations of the Cross with Reflections on Ecology and Justice using the following resource: http://saltandlighttv.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ECOLOGY-JUSTICE-STATIONS-OF-CROSS.pdf

March 2021

- **Ecological Examen: Reconciling God, Creation, and Humanity** – With *Laudato Si'* as their inspiration, The Ignatian Solidarity Network has created an ecological examen that can be accessed here: http://www.ecologicalexamen.org/

Monday, March 22nd – World Water Day

- **Lenten Intergenerational Evening Retreat – Water Is Life: Dignity of the Human Person** – Create an intergenerational evening retreat for World Water Day. Begin with a simple meal at 6pm. Show this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K_VcGFkiSbs then use or adapt the following resource from Catholic Relief Services: https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/usops-resources/water-is-life-facilitator-guide_final3.pdf End the evening by 8pm to be family friendly.

April 2021

Thursday, April 22 – Earth Day

- **Community Cleanup** – Join the great global cleanup movement and select a location or multiple locations within your community where you can engage in cleaning up trash, helping older neighbors with yard work, planting flowers,

trees and, more. Visit the official Earth Day website for more possibilities: https://www.earthday.org/

Friday, April 30th – National Arbor Day

- End the morning Mass or Masses with a procession outdoors to plant seedlings on your campus. Make a commitment to discontinue the use of paper products at parish functions and instead use reusable cups, dishes, and utensils. Perhaps seek a grant that allows you to purchase compostable cups, dishes, and utensils.

May 2021

Sunday, May 9th 2021– 6th Sunday of Easter and Mother's Day

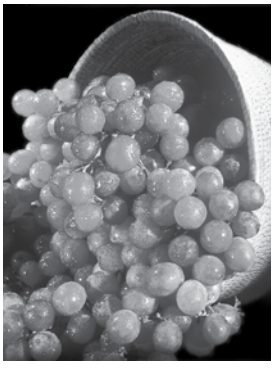
- **Let All Creation Praise Series** – Guided Rosary on Caring for Creation: https://franciscanaction.org/sites/default/files/C4C%20Guided%20Rosary.pdf

Monday, May 10th, Tuesday, May 11th and Wednesday, May 12th – Rogation Days

- Rogation and Ember Days are mentioned in the Roman Missal under Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year, (45-47). Consider incorporating a litany or prayers for creation into the daily Masses. Use this resource from the USCCB for the blessing of seeds, soil and water. https://ccdocle.org/?wpfb_dl=2167
- **Sharing Stories Series – Rogation Days** https://aleteia.org/2017/04/24/the-beautiful-and-ancient-custom-of-blessing-fields-on-rogation-days/

Sunday, May 30th – Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

- **After All Masses** – Consider praying this Litany to the Trinity, the Creator after one or all of the weekend Masses: https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Litany-Care4Creation-Month.pdf



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Poetic Contemplation: Trees as a Model of a Sacramental Reality

by Martha Ligas and James Menkhaus

Mary Oliver's poem When I Am Among the Trees offers an insight into being derived from an encounter with trees. How might her insights be applied to your eucharistic spirituality?

WHEN I AM AMONG THE TREES – MARY OLIVER

When I am among the trees,
Especially the willows and the honey locust,
Equally the beech, the oaks, and the pines,
They give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say they save me, and daily.

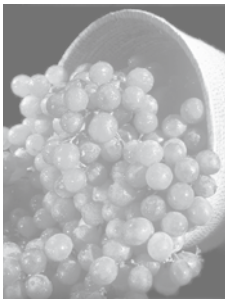
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."[1]

Martha Ligas received her M.A. in Theology from Boston College and James Menkhaus received his Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Duquesne University. Both teach theology at Gilmour Academy in Cleveland, Ohio.

Mary Oliver's poem "When I am Among the Trees" calls us to see creation in a way that both honors trees for what they are, but also calls us to intuit from them a deeper truth. Trees have the power to save, to remind, to transform, and to send us forth. As Oliver observes, "You have to be in the world to understand what the spiritual is about."[2] These reflections arrived at in the forest also contain truth



about the Eucharist. When read attentively, Oliver's poem calls upon something within each of us to honor God's creation and to learn from it. Just as the trees' sacramental nature calls us to a deeper relationship with them, the lessons learned when we sit among them can have a transformative effect on our relationship with God. As Pope Francis reminds us, "[Salvation] comes not from above, but from within… that we might find him in this world of ours (*Laudato Si'* 236)."

First Stanza

In the first stanza of Oliver's work we are oriented to the poet's setting for the remainder of the poem. She either walks amongst the trees, or calls to mind having done so in the past. She considers the trees themselves, as well as transformation within herself, during her encounters with them. She observes five different species of tree, contemplating their salvific nature. But what, exactly, does the poet mean by *saved?* Is she commenting on the literal salvation that the trees provide, filling our lungs with life-breath? Or is there perhaps a metaphorical meaning here, and the salvific nature of the tree extends beyond its natural processes of photosynthesis in order to provide some sort of saving balm for the spirit? If we consider the non-duality of the embodied soul, both body and spirit can be saved simultaneously, and the poet speaks to *both* the breath and the spirit when commenting on the trees' saving nature.

Let's begin by seeking to understand the ways in which trees save the body, namely, through photosynthesis. Through this complex process (though as natural to trees as breathing is for humans), the tree first absorbs light energy from the sun. This energy then combines with two different elements within the tree. The first is carbon dioxide, absorbed from the air, and the second is water, absorbed from the rain. The tree combines these elements to not only make food to sustain its own life, but also to emanate oxygen, which in turn sustains the life of human beings everywhere. Just as the species of tree does not matter, the race, socioeconomic status, or country of origin of the human being receiving the oxygen is of no import. Trees embrace the CO_2 exhaled by all, and in the beauty of reciprocity we all benefit from the trees' output of O_2. Daily, we are saved by the trees.

In addition to this literal salvific nature, there is cause to believe that the poet also comments here on the ways in which the trees provide salvation for the spirit. Pope Francis writes how Saint Francis

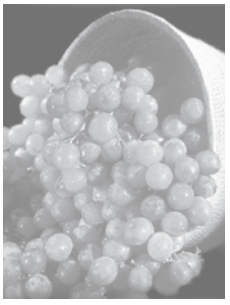
"communed with all creation," and how "every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection" (*LS* 236). He had a relationship to the created world that surpassed mere necessity, but rather was strengthened by positive affect. His connection to the created world was one of kinship. This positive affect is echoed by Oliver as she comments on the "hints of gladness" she feels when she is in the presence of the trees. Oliver recognizes that when she communes with nature she is not solely saved through the gift of literal breath, but simply by being in the presence of the trees.

Second Stanza

The struggle that is felt in Oliver's second stanza stands in contrast to the rest of her poem. The trees that gave off hints of gladness and provided a saving presence at the start can also serve as a reminder that distance from hope is part of the human condition. It is not the trees themselves that embody the feeling of distance, but the distance from their offer of hope and salvation that causes Oliver to feel distant from herself. Her reflection, "I am so distant from the hope of myself" recalls the gulf between the trees' saving nature of body and spirit, yet reminds us that unlike the trees, we cannot do it ourselves. That which brings an offer to save can also illuminate a painful reality — we are, at times, distant from that which provides this saving grace. Oliver's distance from hope, even while surrounded by that which offers to sustain us, reminds us that life is a journey that contains valleys and trials.

Just as the tree cannot live into its fullness without the light of the sun, neither can we live into our fullness without the light of the Eucharist.

Falling short of one's goal, relationship, or ideal serves as a reminder of our humanity and a reminder that God became a human being who also experienced struggles. Indeed, as Jesus was dying, he shouted from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46) His pain and agony were not an elaborate show, but the cries from someone whose hope had been placed in the will of God. Oliver's articulation of distance is very much present in Jesus' cries from the cross — where is God? Interestingly, Jesus was likewise surrounded by God's creation while he thought he was alone and forsaken. As with many gospel stories, the human Christ comes through in these cries and calls us to recall the beautiful truth, central to Christian theology,



that Jesus became a human being so that we may come to know God more fully.

Just as the belief of Jesus as fully human and fully divine can seem logically incomprehensible, the Eucharist can also seem beyond and distant. The mystery of transubstantiation, central to Catholic eucharistic theology, is an element of faith. But even those who believe ardently in this transformation of the bread and wine may struggle to see how this teaching relates to their lives, especially in times of trial. Guilt and despair can easily cause one's "distance from hope" to become a sense of unworthiness that challenges a person's willingness to be open to God's unmerited offer of love. However, Pope Francis reminds us in *Evangelii gaudium* that "the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak" (*EG* 47). As we approach the Eucharist, we do so in our brokenness. Jesus' cries of being forsaken by God in those final moments should remind us of our shared humanity. Moreover, through our trials Jesus promises to be a source of strength. The Eucharist is this gift of self that Jesus offers, not because we are worthy, but for those moments where our hearts ache like Oliver's — "distant from the hope of ourselves."

Third Stanza

Stanza three returns us to the hope of stanza one, but focuses on the need to "stay awhile" in order to experience the potential of relationship. Observing that the trees "stir in their leaves" an invitation to see how the leaves, perhaps viewed as discarded, now also stay awhile around the trees. The intimate relationship between tree and leaf is not violently severed, but is part of the process of change. Contemplating the reality that the leaves briefly stay at the foot of the trees upon falling to the earth, we too should stay with the trees in order to dig deeper into reality. Only then will we see "light flow[s]" from the branches of the trees above. You cannot truly see something unless you take time to look deeply into the reality, circumstance or relationship that is before you, offering itself to you in its completeness and authenticity.

The Jesuit motto to "find God in all things" continues to be a starting point for some theologians who focus on ways that contemplation of the created world can reveal the truth and beauty of its creator. For example, Jesuit priest Anthony De Mello reflects, "Contemplation for me is communication with God that makes a minimal use of words,

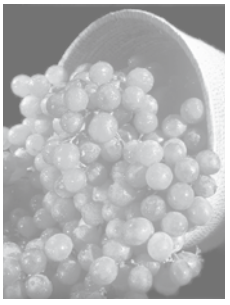
images, and concepts."[3] Applying this approach, Oliver's invitation to sit with the trees "for awhile" can also be a call to contemplate the architect of the created world. Oliver is not asking us to talk to the trees, but to listen to the trees as they call out and reveal something about themselves. Contemplating this invitation from creation allows us to rest our hearts and minds before the trees. The trees are not asking us to change, nor asking us to change them. The trees simply want us to stay with them.

Resting before God's creation can be applied in many areas of our lives. Sitting amongst our friends we may ask ourselves, do we try to change people to be more like us? Or can we accept people as the gifts of God they are? As we sit before God in prayer, do we try to control what God tells us or do we allow God to be God? Moments of eucharistic contemplation can also benefit from Oliver's insight. The receiving of the body and blood of Christ should not be taken lightly, but should be take in a moment of prayerful reflection about the gift being received. Often in church services the reception of the Eucharist can be rushed, or the time of prayer after reception is relegated to a ten second pause before announcements. The beauty of the moment, the reception of Christ that should lead to a change in our lives, requires more attentive prayer. If we sought to "stay awhile" among God's creation, we may be more moved to see the "light flow[s]" from the branches of creation and into the world.

Fourth Stanza

In the final stanza of Oliver's work, we find the poet, once again, listening to the wisdom of the tree. Only this time, instead of asking her to stay, the trees are gently commissioning her to go. However, not without first being "filled with light." In order to understand this phrase, we must return to the process of photosynthesis, this time considering the essential component of the absorption of the sun's rays. The process of photosynthesis entails combining light energy from the sun with carbon dioxide and absorbed water in order to both give the tree life and, in turn, allow humanity to sustain life. Essential to this process is the tree allowing itself to be "filled with light," as without it the process of photosynthesis — the primary purpose of the tree — could not come to fruition.

As we consider this poem in the context of the Eucharist, we again see striking similarities between the purpose of the tree and our own



purposes. Just as the tree cannot live into its fullness without the light of the sun, neither can we live into our fullness without the light of the Eucharist. Through the salvific nature of the sacrament, we are given the energy that, combined with our own God-given abilities and gifts, gives us the grace to co-create the kingdom and bring renewed life to the world. There are three key elements to this process. The first is the reception of the light. As Thomas Merton so beautifully stated in *New Seeds of Contemplation*, "a tree gives glory to God by being a tree."[4] The natural process for a tree is to receive light. It does this just by being. The energy from the sun seeps through the leaves, branches, and the bark, absorbing into the body. The tree's reception of this energy is natural — it does not need to put forth effort, but rather receives this gift of light as naturally as can be. This may be why the poet comments that the process is "simple," a tree needs simply to be a tree in order to receive the light.

For us, however, the process involves a choice. The poet, as she walks among the trees, realizes that if we pay attention we will see and learn that this light is also gifted to us. Similar to the ways in which the trees receive the light of the sun, the gift of the light of the Eucharist is freely given to us daily. Unlike the tree, however, we have the option to choose whether or not we want to receive the gift. In order to be filled with light, we need only to accept the offering, and pause long enough to recognize the grace of the reception.

The second key element to the tree's process of photosynthesis is the mixing of the energy from the sun with water and carbon dioxide. These elements combine with the energy of the sun to continue the process of photosynthesis. Like the tree, there are God-given elements inside of us that combine with the light of the Eucharist in order to help us fulfill our purpose. These elements are our identity, our authenticity, our individual gifts — and, like the water that the tree absorbs — the wisdom that we have received from prophets and friends. This wisdom combines with our gifts to be energized by the Eucharist in order to help us fulfill our purpose.

The final element in this process of photosynthesis, after the tree is "filled with light," is to "shine." Through the combination of the energy from the sun, the carbon dioxide, and the water, the tree then emits oxygen, giving us the air we need to breathe to sustain our lives. So, too, is the reception of the Eucharist. When the light of Christ is absorbed in the breaking of the bread, we become more fully alive. The

Eucharist brings us life, revitalizing God-given gifts and the wisdom and gifts given by community that are all found within us. What are we to do then with this energy and new life? Shine, of course! To make like a tree and stand tall in our authenticity, recognizing that through the natural process of uniting with Christ, we can then, in turn, bring light and renewed life to the world.

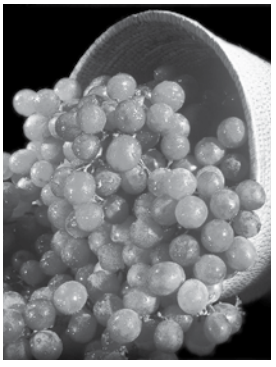
Notes

[1] Mary Oliver, "When I am Among the Trees," in *Thirst* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 4.

[2] "Maria Shriver Interviews the Famously Private Poet Mary Oliver," March 9, 2011. Oprah.com. Harpo Productions, Inc. 2018. http://www.oprah.com/entertainment/maria-shriver-interviews-poet-mary-oliver

[3] Anthony de Mello, Sadhana: *A Way to God* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 29.

[4] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 172), 29.



EUCHARISTIC SPIRITUALITY

Eymard Along the Journey: Eucharistic Reflections of Saint Peter Julian Eymard

by Michael Perez, SSS

Saint Peter Julian Eymard at times drew inspiration from nature to speak about the Eucharist and Catholic spirituality. Here are two intriguing offerings for May and June.

Brother Michael Perez has been a formator for the Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament for more than 30 years and is an expert in Eymardian spirituality.

May 2020

Mme. Natalie Jordan was a close friend of Father Eymard. She was only one year older than him. They both had roots in the Dauphine region of France and shared pride in that fact. Being close in age they also shared some of the convictions, feelings, and ideals of their time. Father Eymard was Mme. Natalie Jordan's spiritual director from roughly 1846-1868. She was appointed by Father Eymard as director of the Married Woman's Branch of the Third Order of Mary.[1] In the following excerpt from a letter he wrote to her, Father Eymard creatively uses the image of the silkworm working diligently underground as an image of "Christian life."[2]

"... My dear Madame, daughter and sister; whatever title you prefer you are now at St. Romans with your silkworms. You are in the peaceful countryside. Enjoy it and may God especially bless your little silk creatures. Isn't it an image of the Christian life; an inert seed, a state of death, breakthrough, resurrection, life, ascension, work, palace, — in our case, Heaven. What a beautiful lesson of humility we learn from these worms! They accomplish such beautiful things in the weakest state. … "

All yours in our Lord,
Eymard, P.M.

June 2020

Father Eymard gave an annual retreat to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament. To this religious group, which he founded, he offered some of his deepest eucharistic reflections. This excerpt is from a conference given to the sisters at their Paris Convent in 1860.[3]

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

Paris, Thursday, August 2, 1860

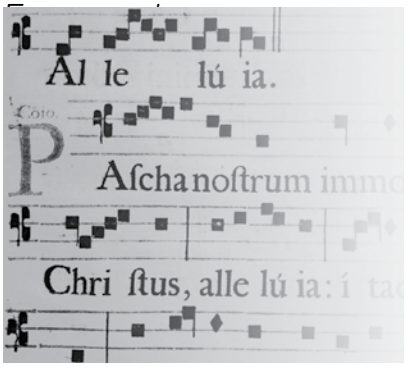
"My Sisters, it is necessary that you should become like the grain of wheat, the substance of which is totally transformed. We will consider the grain of wheat reaching its condition as a host, becoming Jesus Christ. That will give you an idea of what you need to do to attain Eucharistic life. The grain of wheat is cast on earth and there it dies and its life springs from its death. From this death comes forth a seed. The grain becomes a plant. It becomes the wheat. Then we gather the ear, put it in the mill and it becomes flour. It is moistened, becomes a paste, and is put in the fire. We make a Host and then it becomes the Body of Jesus Christ. That is what you need to do to become the Body of Jesus Christ."

Notes

1 Catherine Marie Carron, SSS, *The Life and Letters of Saint Peter Julian Eymard. Volume Two: The Transition Years 1853 - 1857*. (Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, Waterville, Maine) 389.

2 Ibid, 134.

3 Selected Conferences for Eymardian Formation. Book 5 - The Cenacle: A Place of Transformation. (Rome, Servants of the Blessed Sacrament, 2005) 9.



PASTORAL LITURGY

How to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours - Part 3

by John Thomas J. Lane, SSS

Blessed Sacrament Father John Thomas Lane, SSS holds degrees in music, education and liturgy. He currently serves as pastor of his home parish, Saint Paschal Baylon Roman Catholic Church, Highland Heights, Ohio but has also been a pastor in Houston, Albuquerque, vocation minister, and diocesan director of liturgy. For questions, other resources or workshops he could do for your parish, contact him at jtlanesss@gmail.com or (440) 442-3410.

The Liturgy of the Hours can seem daunting at times. In the last column I offered answers to common questions about the Liturgy of the Hours (LH). In this column I share some questions from LH prayer leaders whom I have trained. I've included some quotes from the *General Instructions of the Liturgy of the Hours* (GILH) in my responses:

Why do monasteries promote praying all the hours and parishes only two?

The "hinge" hours (see GILH 40) are Morning and/or Evening Prayer. These two are part of a "cathedral style" or popular style of prayer that, historically, were the only hours in which parishioners with active lifestyles were able to take part. Monasteries celebrate as many of the hours as they are able, due to the nature of their vocation, since many have the charism of "praying unceasingly."

Why are lay people invited to join with the priest(s) to pray LH?

It is not that lay people are invited, but rather that it is the right of all the baptized, lay or cleric, to pray this communal prayer together as often as possible. A few countries, such as Poland, have historically promoted the LH for of all members of the faith. Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church retrieved the vernacular and communal methods of prayer and have encouraged widespread participation, since it is "the Church's prayer." All are welcome and encouraged to have a LH prayer book, either the one-volume or the four-volume set, to participate in this communal prayer of the Church. Because of our baptism, when we were anointed like Christ as "priest, prophet and king," we exercise this "priestly office" of prayer (see GILH 15).

GILH 23 reminds us that "those in holy orders … must therefore see to it that people are invited" to join in this meaningful prayer. LH is a public prayer, not private, and belongs to the whole Church (see GILH 20).

Are lay people required or bound to pray the LH?

No, but lay people are encouraged to join in as much as possible. Parishes are likewise encouraged to offer opportunities for this prayer. Most parishes in the United States do not celebrate this ritual. Ask your pastor to offer, lead and/or celebrate LH so that others may join (See GILH 27). If the pastor is unavailable, perhaps a small group could form to offer this prayer regularly. GILH 12 also reminds us that the LH is an excellent preparation for Eucharist. As many parishes offer the rosary before Mass, perhaps LH could also be part of a spiritual preparation for the celebration of Eucharist.

Is it better if the LH is chanted?

There are plenty of videos that show monasteries and convents in which the religious are singing the LH. However, it is not required. It is a hope that in communal settings parts may be chanted or sung. In a paragraph about "progressive solemnities," GILH 273 reminds us that each day is not the same: Easter is not Ordinary Time; it is a feast day, not a memorial. Singing could then be used to signify differing solemnities. Singing is commendable, but is based on the talents and gifts of the community and the person presiding. If chanting is not possible, it is better for the LH psalms to be recited rather than not prayed at all.

While there are petitions or intercessions in the book, am I allowed to verbalize my own aloud?

This depends on the custom of the local community. Some communities, whether religious orders, seminaries, or parishes, do not allow a moment for intercessions to be added. However, it is not forbidden in the LH or GILH. Adding personal or communal petitions can be a very meaningful experience, drawing the community closer to God and each other. The presider can invite these personal petitions with the question, "For what else shall we pray?"

There are occasions that warrant a special request for the community to pray. For example: in times of tragedy or emergency. Likewise, specific religious communities offer prayers in relation to significant events in their history. Lastly, there is usually only one prayer for vocations in the entire 4-week cycle, even though it would be worthwhile to more frequently ask God to bless the community with ordained priests, deacons, religious, lay leaders and other ministries for our Church's life.

Organizing for May/June 2020

Key: *Book of Blessings* (BB), *Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers* (CHBP), *Ceremonial of Bishops* (CB).

Regular celebrations during these months:

- Crowning an image of Mary, (CB 1033-1055) or The Rites — Volume II, published by the Liturgical Press, 1991, see pages 451–478 for the introduction and options.
- Regina Caeli; Eastertime Marian Prayer (CHBP).
- Rogation Days; Blessing of Fields and Gardens (CHBP).
- Confirmation of children baptized as infants.
- First Holy Communion.
- May is Older Americans Month**,** so one could celebrate at one time "Blessing of Elderly People Confined to their Homes" (BB 363–368) or the Anointing of the Sick (PCS).
- End of the school year liturgies, see *Lectionary for Masses with Children* for suggestions of readings.

See the *Lectionary Supplement* for the readings for the following days:

- Thursday, May 21: Saint Christopher Magallanes.
- Friday, May 22: Saint Rita of Cascia.

Thursday, May 7: National Day of Prayer Observed and, in our liturgies, we may mention an intercession for our nation.

Friday, May 8: Holocaust Remembrance Day (USA).

Sunday, May 10: Mother's Day (BB 1724-1728) – and 5th Sunday of Easter.

Wednesday, May 13: Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament or Our Lady of Fatima. See special lectionaries for religious communities that celebrate this Eucharistic feast. For Our Lady of Fatima see the *Lectionary Supplement*.

Solemnity of the Ascension of Our LORD:

- Thursday, May 21 only in ecclesiastical provinces of Boston, Hartford, New York, Newark, Philadelphia and the State of Nebraska.
- Sunday, May 24 everywhere else.

- Due to the annual calendars given by funeral home that show both days, make sure to note in your bulletin the correct readings, Mass intentions, and other pertinent information for your parish.

Sunday, May 24: 7th Sunday of Easter or Ascension of the Lord — 5th Anniversary of the Promulgation of *Laudato Si'.* Consider incorporating prayers and preaching focused on the themes of *Laudato Si'* (ex. our relationship with God, our neighbor, and the earth). End the Universal Prayer with A Prayer for Our Earth from *Laudato Si', 246.*

Memorial Day: Monday, May 25. See CHBP ad Order for Visiting a Cemetery (BB 1734–1754) with the Easter Weekday readings or optional saints for the day.

Monday, June 1: This is the third year for the new **"Memorial of Mary, Mother of the Church, Monday after Pentecost."** See the ordo and/or websites for the specific readings and prayers.

Sunday, June 14: Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ: Invite your first communion children to return for a special Mass and procession with the Blessed Sacrament including Exposition. See *Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist* or the special USA ritual book, *Order for the Solemn Exposition of the Holy Eucharist* for details.

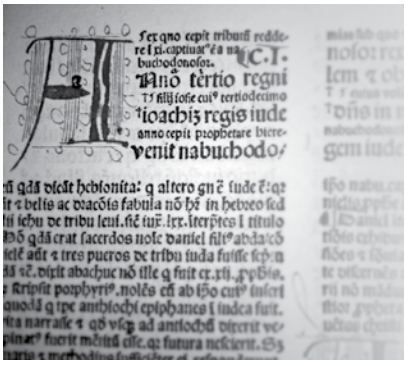
Friday, June 19: Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Saturday, June 20: Memorial of the Immaculate Heart of Mary

Sunday, June 21: Father's Day (see CHBP or BB 1729–1733).

Monday, June 29: Solemnity of Saints Peter and Paul. Why not add something fun for this daily Mass congregation by suggesting a reception after Mass for this summer festival?

In our next column, I'll begin a commentary on the updated *Order of Baptism of Children, Second edition.* Unfortunately, there were no preview copies available before the writing of these early 2020 columns. In the July/August 2020 column, the new rite will have become standard for the United States Church.



Scriptural Reflections — Homiletics

by Barbara Shanahan

Barbara Shanahan is an alumna of Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, Illinois. She has led the Buffalo, New York, Catholic Bible Studies Program since 1992.

May 3, 2020
Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14A, 36-41; Psalm 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6; 1 Peter 2:20B-25; John 10:1-10

In the biblical world, and even today in the Middle East, families who own sheep have a vested interest in their flock. Those entrusted with tending to the flock have to be skilled, trustworthy, and watchful, safeguarding the family interest. Above and beyond this, if one is truly committed, a bond might develop between sheep and shepherd. In 2 Samuel 12:1-7 the prophet Nathan tells King David a parable about a poor man who had one little ewe lamb that grew up with his family, shared what little food they had, and slept in his bosom. Perhaps more familiar to us is Jesus' parable of the shepherd who goes out to find the one lost sheep and who rejoices upon finding the missing animal. He then sets it on his shoulders and brings it home. Both parables depict something about leadership: one pattern admirable, the other not.

The gospel for today speaks of Jesus as the good shepherd who sets the standard for shepherds by giving his life for his sheep. John also uses the metaphor of Jesus as the sheep-gate suggesting he is the new way that leads the sheep safely home and he is the one who will keep the flock free from harm. He will protect and keep in safety those who follow him. Jesus has a vested interest in the safety of the flock. He loves them and he knows them. They respond confidently to his voice because he has engendered trust in them by his willingness to place their safety and well being ahead of his own.

The reading from the First Letter of Peter brings together two different strands of tradition: the self-sacrificing life of the shepherd and the suffering servant of the Fourth Servant Song (Cf. Isa 52:13-53).

There we see one who, led away like a lamb to slaughter, surrenders himself to death. He bears the sins of many and takes the punishment upon himself, in order to make humanity whole. It is easy to see why references to the shepherd have become part of the Church's paschal tradition.

Shepherd imagery weaves throughout the entire Bible in various ways. Often it is used in relation to leaders, especially the king. David is the standard: the humble, simple shepherd from Bethlehem. He is youngest of Jesse's sons chosen by God to be king. Subsequently, the king was to oversee the people after the manner of David "one whose origins were from of old, from ancient times…" who would shepherd by the strength of God, bringing security and peace (Cf. Micah 5:1-4). Sadly, this ideal seldom matched the reality. The people were often described as bereft, like "sheep without a shepherd (Zech 10:2 and Mark 6:34)" causing pity to well up in the heart of Jesus.

Today we speak of "pastoral" leaders or ministers when we speak of those entrusted with the care of God's people. Yet, the rich and varied biblical understanding of the role of shepherds/pastors should inform, define, and challenge those who are called to serve the Church. For the sake of all who are fearful, lost, or disillusioned, we pray that those called into service look to the Good Shepherd so that we may come and go freely and safely through the sheep-gate that is Christ, able to hear his voice in theirs.

…though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me… (Ps 23:4).

May 10, 2020
Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts of the Apostles 6:1-7, Psalm 33:1-2, 4-5, 18-19; 1 Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

How can we possibly imagine, feel, or know what we mean to God! Last Sunday the liturgical readings led us to ponder the relationship of sheep and shepherds. This Sunday we are told of the enormous dignity that is ours as a holy people, especially chosen as God's own to announce God's praises. Words give shape to a reality we are only able to grasp in faith. How important then to listen to the words of Scripture! Here we have a light that guides faith to greater understanding.

Scripture is God's gift to us for that very reason. We do not take the metaphors literally: God is not a shepherd or a living cornerstone. But for us to be able to imagine and relate to God, we need words and concepts from our world to help us. Divine things often fall beyond the reach of our mind. Pondering biblical images help us to get to the heart of what the biblical authors intend to communicate to us about God. However, this can be challenging, because images are multivalent. Their meaning can grow and change over time.

Consider the image of "the living word of God" in 1 Peter. 1 Peter 2:9 states, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." These words were first addressed to the people of Israel in the wilderness as a summary of their covenant with God, (Cf. Exodus 19:1-8). But here this living word takes on new meaning as it includes the baptized Christian who shares the same privileges and prerogatives as the Israelites in their covenant with God. The author addresses the reader with words and recollections that are familiar and understandable and then includes them in an expansive understanding of salvation. So we see how God generously unfolds the mystery of God's love for God's people. These words of Scripture are living words that can reveal the breadth of God's mercy, love and faithfulness in this new age. To extract the author's meaning, we have to ponder the words, images and their association with the past. The deeper our grasp of Old Testament references, the richer is our appreciation of the mystery of Christ in our life as Christians.

As the word of God is living, so too is the Church. Living organisms by definition experience growth and change or else they die. In the text from Acts, we learn that there is a disagreement as the mission of the Church expanded and made greater demands. Priorities had to be set and provisions made to utilize the gifts of those within the community. It has often been said that there is no lack of vocations in the Church; we just need to recognize the gifts of the Spirit that reside within its members. Answers can come from unlikely places.

It is always a bit intimidating to adapt existing structures and patterns in our life, family, Church or society as we respond to changing realities. How to determine whether something is a "foundation stone" or a "stumbling block" requires prayer and willingness to embrace the will of God. Failure to do so is not an option. The weight of trying to maintain outmoded ways will end in collapse and with that, the Spirit's direction is stifled. Trusting in prayer and keeping our mind and heart focused on

Jesus, we have the assurance that he is *the way* that leads us, *the truth* of which we can be certain and *the life* that will give us life.

May 17, 2020
Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; Psalm 66:1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 16, 20; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21

The account from Acts picks up threads of thought that link with what we have been reading in the lectionary this Easter season. Persecution of the Church and the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 7) set events in motion. First, the mission of the Church now reaches beyond Jerusalem to Samaria. The Samaritans have a shared history with the Jews but had parted ways hundreds of years prior. Second, we learn of the story of Philip, one of the seven selected to assist the apostles in serving the community. These are identified as Hellenists (non-Jews) and perhaps were more readily received by the Samaritans than Jewish disciples. Here we begin to see the changing face of the Church: that Gentiles and non-Jews have a place (Cf. the rest of Acts 8 and 10). Third, the visit by Peter and John links the baptism of the Samaritan believer with the Pentecost event and the coming of the Spirit. Pentecost, as we observe in Acts, was not one singular event, but a recurring experience as the Church grew.

In light of significant changes, how comforting must Jesus' words have proven to be! In today's gospel Jesus continues his farewell discourse to his disciples, giving them direction and encouragement. It's interesting to consider what people think Jesus meant when he said, "Keep my commandments." When asked, most reply, "the Ten Commandments." As basic as these are to order and civility among people, the word "law" or "command" has a much richer and demanding meaning in the biblical tradition. Understanding "the law" is complex and the context changes from Old to New Testaments. But generally, in the biblical tradition the "commandments" imply more that the "Ten." For Israel, in a broad sense, every word God speaks is a command! Israel was covenanted with God and the requirement of that covenant was that Israel was to listen to God's voice and walk in God's ways. This encompasses the Ten Commandments and so much more.

Are you comfortable thinking this way? It demands of Israel and of us a careful listening and attentiveness to God. It requires a daily hearing of what God is asking of us personally. We hear this in the depth of our mind and heart. Law is the other side of covenant. Israel welcomed the law as gift because in keeping it, they knew how to please God and maintain their relationship. Law was a guide-rail; an instruction for living that would yield peace (Cf. Psalm 19). Is this what Jesus is saying to us, "Listen to every word that comes from the mouth of God and do it?"

Jesus is specific, "keep *my* commandments." This implies more than just the "Ten." How does Jesus give an example of his attentiveness? What are his commands? We need to look to his example. How does he teach us? He is constantly attuned to the will of God. He spends time in prayer, even more so when he seems, at times, to struggle with the listening. Jesus encourages us as he did his disciples. He promises that if we keep his commands, we will possess the Spirit, we will not be alone, and we will live in the Father. Certainly a discipline is required of us to establish such a way of life, but what else brings with it such a promise of peace!

May 21, 2020
Ascension Thursday

Acts 1:1-11; Psalm 47:2-3, 6-7, 8-9; Ephesians 1:17-23; Matthew 28:16-20

"I am with you always." These are the concluding words of the Gospel of Matthew that remind us of the commitment of our God to us! If we recall the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew, one of the titles given to the son of Mary and Joseph is, Emmanuel, meaning "God with us." When read as a whole, from the beginning of the story of the earthly life of Jesus to today's feast of the ascension we witness a life lived in complete fidelity to what God has promised and asked of his son. From the beginning to the end of Matthew's Gospel we witness the unfolding revelation of our God who is with us, who wishes to be among us.

What do we see and know of this "God with us?" If we read the gospels with this question in mind, we look beyond the surface narrative to discover the extent of God's love for us, but we also learn what is asked of one who desires to live in the presence of this God. Can we take into

our understanding just what it means — that God lives daily with us? Does such a gradual dawning awareness of God's presence call our hearts to change, to live in hope, to take comfort, to give courage, to keep seeking for understanding with God's grace?

When Jesus takes leave of his disciples what is left in their memories? Each one of us knows this feeling. Each of us has experienced some form of separation from people who have shared life with us. Sadly, in some cases bonds are broken and irretrievably lost, but we also know the experience of relationships that continue to bring goodness to us in spite of death, distance or new demands. There can be a presence, a stronger spiritual bond that has at its roots the good of the other. There can be a shared vision and the opportunity to flourish in the face of new experiences even if these are shared vicariously. The experience of such a presence springs from a mutual life in God who gave the gift of the "other" in the first place. Such a grace is palpable and real and cuts through death or distance. This must have been the experience for the disciples, that Jesus never really left them. His spirit enlivened them to go into the uncertain future that would unfold in unexpected ways.

How can we relate to the experience of the disciples? In many ways we cannot. We never met Jesus as a flesh and blood human being — walking, talking, laughing; a friend we have loved. We "have not seen yet we believe" and so "blessed are we" as the Gospel of John declares (John 20:29). For us, through study, prayer, openness in faith and reflective silence we come to experience this divine presence in mysterious ways. When we are prompted to be receptive to new insights, to live faith in deeper ways that may not always be clear. When we follow the promptings of our heart to do good and make a difference in the life of others. When we do these things God is lovingly present to us. And even when we fail Jesus graciously promises to remain with us until the end of the ages — Emmanuel.

May 24, 2020
Seventh Sunday of Easter

Acts 1:12-14; Psalm 27: 1, 4, 7-8; 1 Peter 4:13-16; John 17:1-11A

Luke always brings his reader back to Jerusalem. It is a focal point

throughout his Gospel and here, at the beginning of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles is Luke's second volume that tells the story of the beginnings of the Church, sprung from the rich soil of Judaism and Jerusalem. After the ascension, which for Luke takes place on the Mount of Olives (a mile or two outside Jerusalem) he then leads us back to the "upper room." This is different from Mark and Matthew who return to Galilee in their post-resurrection narratives. We might wonder if this is the same "upper room" where Jesus and the disciples celebrated their last Passover together. Could it also be where they were hiding behind locked doors out of fear when Jesus came to them the evening of the resurrection, breathing on them and imparting his spirit to them? Once again, now in Acts, they gather together in prayer as they await what is to come. When uncertain of how to proceed, it is important to be still and wait. Wherever this "upper room" might be for each of us, it is important to know how, when, and where to prayerfully retreat.

The readings today focus our attention on this group of disciples. If they are at all bewildered, this safe place of prayer and remembrance prepares them for what is to come. On another level, the gospel reading should provide this place for us. The prayer of Jesus is a rare moment that offers us a glimpse into the heart of Jesus as he is portrayed in John's Gospel. Jesus' prayer for his disciples should be a source of strength. Whatever may come, that prayer has been made for them and for us. The reading from 1 Peter similarly invites us to consider the privileges bestowed on those who follow Jesus while also considering the cost of being a disciple.

We need to take ourselves into that "upper room" if we are to reflect on the significance of what Jesus asks of his Father in prayer. That prayer states that everything bestowed on the Son by the Father be handed onto, "those you have given me." This includes eternal life, the power to know God, the revelation of God's own name/identity, the word the Father has made known to the Son that he in turn makes known to them! The Gospel of John often speaks of "the hour," a time when the Son of Man is glorified (Cf. John 4:23, 5:25, 12:23, 17:1). Throughout the whole gospel, there are moments when this glory is revealed but the ultimate manifestation is the hour of Jesus' death. The gospel has prepared the reader to anticipate this paradox, accomplished through Jesus' passion, death and resurrection. The glory Jesus gives to the Father returns to him. "Those you have given me," are the ones with eyes to perceive this.

How much is demanded of "those you have given me!" Each one of us is included here, as each one of us hopes to be the recipient of the eternal life promised. No one is exempt unless they choose to excuse themselves. Those included in this prayer have not only a privileged place, but also a great responsibility. No disciple may adopt the passive stance of an idle observer. The disciple is one who, "rejoices to the extent that you share in the sufferings of Christ so that you may likewise rejoice in his glory (1 Peter 4:13)." However, knowing that Jesus has prayed for us brings us peace.

May 31, 2020
Solemnity of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3B-7, 12-13; John 20: 19-23

The Spirit of the Lord fills the world… (Wisdom 1:7)

Today's feast of Pentecost reminds us that something new has been breathed forth upon us; something beyond our sight, renewing the face of the earth. What can this mean?

The Bible opens with the stories of creation. In the first of these, a mighty wind sweeps over the face of the deep. Then God speaks and brings order and calm to the chaos. Into this sphere where chaos reigned, God summons forth a world of beauty and goodness, harmony and balance that evolves day by day. God looks at all God has created and pronounces it seven times good.

In the second creation story, God breathes into the clay he has formed and behold a living being comes into existence, sharing the life breath of God! This spirit-filled earthling is shown the wonders of the garden he calls home. He is given the task of tending, cultivating, and caring for the earth and all its creatures. This work ennobles him and makes humans partners with God in creation. The task given to humankind is to do what God has done and then take a step back to admire just how good it all is, cherishing the wonders of their earthly home.

Psalm 104, the responsorial psalm for this feast of Pentecost, is yet another version of the story of creation. It is beautiful in its poetry

and meaning, reflecting on the work of God in all of its order and magnificence, providence, and mystery. One spontaneously cries out with the Psalmist, "Bless the Lord my soul, O Lord my God how great you are…clothed in majesty… wrapped in light…."

God's act of creation was not ended on the 6th day! God's work continues to unfold as generation after generation plumb the potential implanted in it by God. This "work in progress" is tied to its creator by an umbilical cord that allows all the inhabitants of the earth to draw life and power from this divine source. As the Psalmist says, "the creatures look to you to give them food… you give it, they gather it…you open your hand they are filled…you hide your face they are dismayed… take away their breath, they die…."

Pope Francis has written in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* that we are brought to contemplate the Trinity when we contemplate the wonders of the universe. We contemplate the Father as we reflect that God is the source of all that exists. We contemplate the Son, through whom all things were made, who united himself to the earth when he took on human flesh. And we contemplate the Spirit, a life-giving force, ultimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing to light new pathways that lead us into the mystery of God that are perceptible in the wonders of creation (*LS* 238).

Today, on the Solemnity of Pentecost, we stand back and reflect on the third person of the Trinity: the Spirit. The Latin of the Nicene Creed refers to the Holy Spirit with the title "*Vivificatem*" the "Giver of Life." Today, we especially need this Giver of Life to restore what has been lost. We need the Holy Spirit to teach us and inspire us to action and bring us along new pathways to peace. We need the Holy Spirit to inspire a greater awareness and care of our universe.

Let us weep with our mother earth, for her children who wander without a place to call home, for the beasts, mighty and small, the birds and sea creatures, for all the loveliness of our home threatened by greed, disregard, and neglect. We pray, "Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth (Ps 104:30)."

June 7, 2020
The Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity

Exodus 34:4B–6, 8-9; Psalm: Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56; 2 Corinthians 13:11-13; John 3:16-18

One popular analogy that attempts to help us plumb the mystery we celebrate today is that of the sun and its effects. The Father, like the sun, is the source of light, energy and warmth. The Son is a ray of sunshine that streams from the source, bringing to us all the energy of the sun. The Spirit is the effect of the sun and the sunray, the warmth that we feel on our face, penetrating our body and warming the earth and the sea.

Once again, we are left to imagine the unfathomable reality of God with images drawn from our world. Despite their inherent limitations, analogical images are one of the few ways we have to penetrate the incomprehensible. The writer of Exodus, in our first reading today, is wrestling with the same challenge: how to speak of God. Earlier in the narrative, Moses had asked God for some clarification, "What is your name?" In other words, "Who are you?" Moses felt he needed some credibility before appearing before Pharaoh to request the deliverance of the Israelites. So he asks, who are you to give me marching orders? Recall then God's answer to Moses, "I am." Is this much of an answer? Perhaps Moses could not really understand who God is until he has experienced God in his own life. This may be not unlike children who receive the impression of faith from their parents, but oftentimes need to discover who God is for themselves in their own terms. Moses journeys long and far and faces many trials with the Israelites and through it all God shows himself to be Moses' mainstay, present and responsive whatever the need. Everything Israel learns of God is found in the story of Exodus. God is with them, fights for them, provides for their needs, and is patient with their grumbling. God even enters into a covenant bond with them.

The text we consider today from Exodus 34 concludes the story of the golden calf. One strand of that story is Israel's grave sin. In response, God became angry and threatened to destroy the people but Moses intervened with God to change God's mind. As the story unfolds, Moses becomes angry when he sees for himself what the Israelites were doing. He then smashes the tablets he had brought down from

the mountain, the symbol of the mutual covenant between Israel and God. We are given to think by this that the covenant was now broken beyond repair. But here God reveals something that is necessary for us to always remember about God: that God's identity and nature (God's name) is, "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and fidelity." This helps us consider that humankind by nature will always be flawed and prone to sin, but God, by God's divine nature, will always be forgiving and merciful. Without this certain knowledge, we would be lost.

Will we ever plumb the depths of the Trinitarian life of God! The concluding words of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians would seem to make it very simple, "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. (2 Cor 13:13)" Grace suggests the life of God that we share. This is made visible to us through Jesus who puts a human face on God. The ability to experience this living presence is the work of the Spirit who is given to remain with us, to teach and testify to the truth. When we are not able to touch and understand something, it seems to elude us. This may certainly be the case with the Holy Trinity. Nevertheless we ask the help of this abiding Spirit, to accompany and guide us. God remains a mystery to be lived and not a problem to be solved. God remains God and there is something right about that.

June 14, 2020
Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ

Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 14B-16A; Psalm 147:12-13, 14-15, 19-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; John 6:51-58

The word that dominates the gospel for today is "life" or variations of that, such as: "living bread," "living Father," "eternal life." In a verse that introduces the Bread of Life discourse from which today's gospel is taken, Jesus tells the crowd, whom he gave food the day before, that they should not be seeking bread that perishes but food that endured for eternal life. They want lunch, but Jesus wishes more for them. He is talking about something entirely different! Similarly, in the passage from Deuteronomy, Moses recalls their forty years of wandering, citing that their hunger and their being fed was a purposeful part of God's plan for them. This transpired in order that they might realize "it is not

by bread alone that they live."

The point of the desert testing was to prove whether or not the Israelites had learned the ways of God. The desert test would reveal their intentions, what was hidden in their hearts. Israel lived from miracle to miracle, but in between they seemed to falter in their ability to trust. They seemed more familiar with the ways of Egypt than the ways of their God. Is this not the same mentality Jesus encounters with the crowd who returned a second time because the day before they received a meal? They missed the life that Jesus was offering them! It is not by food alone that we live! Jesus offers something more.

How do we come to know this? Perhaps being familiar with the stories of the Old Testament and how they can relate to the gospel references will help us reflect on a deeper meaning. In the wilderness wandering, one thing that is clear is that God is always near to God's people. God is watching over them and aware each time they cry out in need. God's presence with God's people is one of the most consistent themes in the Bible. But does this really resonate with us when we too feel some threat to our well-being? What lies within our hearts? How deep are our loyalties? How familiar are we with the ways of God? Biblical stories are there to teach and question us, not simply tell us what happened to the Israelites three thousand years ago.

Faith is not easy especially in a world people desire everything to be known and explained. It is possible to grow in this important dimension of our spiritual life. We are called to look beyond the surface to the deeper realities. This is precisely what Jesus said to the crowd, "You see but you do not believe!" You see but you do not see! There is an intentional attitude required of us if we are to "see" and "believe." This is required of us each time we approach the altar. A recent poll revealed that a significant number of people do not believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Could it be that we have not given sufficient thought to the role of faith in the mystery of God's presence in the Eucharist? Without this source of life, how are we to be the living presence of Christ, sent forth from our celebration to bring that living presence into the world? Ours cannot be a passive response, but one that calls us forth in faith to be that living presence.

June 21, 2020
Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jeremiah 20:10 -13; Psalm 69:8-10, 14, 17, 33-35; Romans 5:12-15; Matthew 10:26-33

Today we return to "Ordinary Time" and continue with the Mission Discourse in Matthew's Gospel. Back in the Eleventh Week of Ordinary Time we began this section of Matthew's Gospel. It would be a good idea to re-read Matthew 10:1-25 which contains the naming of the apostles, a description of the extent and nature of their mission, the perils that are part of proclaiming the kingdom, and Jesus sending them forth. The trials described are likely also a reality for the Church Matthew addresses.

The passage from Jeremiah today is taken from the fifth of his laments. The laments are a singular feature in the Book of Jeremiah. They are heart-wrenching cries from the prophet to God when he feels he has no one to listen to him, including God. They must be read in light of the fact that the prophet believes he has been chosen to speak the word of God to the people, but opposition surrounds him. It even seems to Jeremiah as if God too has become unreliable in his defense. It may be that Jeremiah never intended his words to see the light of day, but Israel preserved these words and so they have become, "the word of God for us."What can we learn from these laments? We see that Jeremiah's faith was not always unshakable. Indeed, there are times when we may seem to be quite uncertain as to how God will rescue our poor soul even as we entrust our lives to God. Yet, as a prophet, he was entrusted with God's word and in the midst of his personal crisis, he claims God as his strength and he never lets go of that trust.

There is a rich tradition of lament throughout the Old Testament and invariably in the midst of the bitter cry of the troubled soul, we catch a ray of light: a "but"! We find this in Jeremiah 20:11. In this brief passage we see the troubles faced by Jeremiah, but this is balanced by the sure hope that the Lord is with him as his champion. Hope is truly profound when we do not see what it is we hope for. How often is life like that? How often is God like that!

The message found in the gospel likely addressed the bitter and contentious situations that existed at the time Matthew was writing

his gospel. There were serious divisions and great bitterness between various factions of Jews, and between Jews and Christians. This Mission Discourse calls the Christian to do what the prophet was called to do: to proclaim their faith and conviction in the midst of hardships. Neither the prophet nor the disciple could reject the invitation to reveal what had been concealed, to make known what had been hidden. The reward that both receive is the intangible reassurance of God's love and protection, something that can only be known in faith. Jeremiah knew God would rescue the life of the poor from the evildoers and the Christian disciple knew that the gracious gift of Jesus Christ brought life and grace.

June 28, 2020
Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

2 Kings 4:8-11, 14-16A; Psalm 89:2-3, 16-17, 18-19; Romans 6:3-4, 8-11; Matthew 10:37-42

We find the stories about Elijah and his successor Elisha in the Book of Kings. These prophets, living in the 9th century BCE are described as performing miraculous deeds, such as healing, restoring life, and multiplying bread. Both prophets are referred to as a "Man of God," or *Ish Elohim*. The title implies one whose life is given over to God so completely that they are a channel of divine activity, under divine control, and endowed with special powers. We see this in the cycle of stories about them.

There is a noticeable similarity between today's reading about the hospitable couple from Shunem who just happen to be childless and the familiar story about Abraham and Sarah who receive three visitors who are divine messengers. The visitors are given a gracious welcome by Abraham, including a fine lunch and a shady spot to rest. In turn, the visitors reveal that within a year Sarah will give birth to a child, the long awaited heir. The reward for such generous hospitality is the gift of life in the Genesis account (18:1-15) and also here in the story about Elisha.

The obvious link between the text from Kings and today's gospel is the mention of rewards for welcoming those who are busy about the work of God (the apostle, the missionary, the man or the woman of

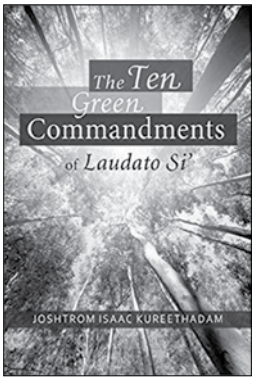
God, etc.). Some are called to serve as prophets or apostles. Some are called to give up home, family, and lands for the sake of the kingdom as missionaries. Yet, others seem to be called to remain at home and open their doors to welcome the prophet, the missionary and the disciple. This is how we each can become part of the proclamation of the kingdom. God's gratuitous love and goodness is available to each one of us since we all have our unique calling. Hospitable welcome and gracious reception brings a mutual reward and blessing of those who are called and sent.

At the conclusion of the Missionary Discourse there are short admonitions that bear consideration. So important are they that we cannot leave these words on the page of the Bible. These are words we need to take to heart. Imperfect as we might be at living them, we need to let them question us. There are three points: 1) Prioritize your relationship with God above all things; 2) Take up your cross and follow Jesus; 3) Find your life by taking yourself out of the center of your world. Each of these has an impact on the other and they are costly to put into practice. Everything that has been said about the disciple/missionary in this discourse prior to these statements demands adherence to these points and acceptance of the challenge to live one's calling faithfully.

Well do Paul's words fit here, offering us another way to reflect on the expectations of the gospel. This is our life as baptized Christians. We have been buried with Christ, we share a death like his, and so we will share also in the newness of life he promises. What a noble effort, so worthy of all our life energy!

Book Reviews

Fr. Kureethadam's text offers a clear, enlightening study of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* (*LS*). The Preface informs the reader that the text will be expository in nature rather than evaluative or critical of Francis' text (xvii). Truth be told, I was initially somewhat disappointed to think that the book I was beginning to read would not be offering any critical commentary on the encyclical. However, upon completing my reading of the text, I understand and concur with Kureethadam's expository approach. This descriptive approach is indeed important to assist the reader to more clearly understand the several important contributions made by Pope Francis in *LS*.



THE TEN GREEN COMMANDMENTS OF LAUDATO SI'
Joshtrom Isaac Kureethadam
The Liturgical Press
Collegeville, MN
2019

Perhaps an initial point to clarify is that the text of *LS* does not itself speak of "ten green commandments." This term is an insight of Fr. Kureethadam and is used as an interpretive key to understanding the main ideas of Pope Francis' teaching in *LS*. Given this clarification, the text of *The Ten Green Commandments of Laudato Si'* (hereafter, TGC) is composed with a double structure. There are three parts to the text that follow "the scheme of the see-judge-act methodology increasingly used in social sciences (xvii)." Within these three parts we find the author's ten green commandments. These "follow the main outline of the six chapters of the encyclical… (xvii)." Unlike the biblical commandments which are phrased with the all-too-familiar *"thou shalt not,"* each green commandment is stated with a positive imperative verb: "take care of," "listen," "rediscover," "recognize," "acknowledge," "develop," "learn," "educate," "embrace," "cultivate."

Each chapter of TGC states one of these commandments and then proceeds to unpack its meaning. This process is done at successively deeper levels that include scientific, ethical, and theological insights. TGC cites the text of *LS* extensively "to let Pope Francis speak directly to the reader (xvii)." In addition, Fr. Kureethadam offers the reader extensive contextual information regarding the various themes of *LS*. In particular, the important magisterial teaching of Ecumenical Patriarch

Bartholomew I, little known to most Roman Catholics, is brought to light throughout the text of TGC. Fr. Kureethadam also highlights the contributions of several national episcopal conferences as well as the work of significant theologians and scientists. All of the above have made important contributions to the several issues surrounding the current crisis of the environment and of society in general.

Not surprisingly, the historical hero of *LS* is Saint Francis of Assisi. Francis is held high as a model person who recognized and contemplated God's beauty both in nature and in the poor. Francis melded his contemplative appreciation of nature and humanity to his lifelong care for both the natural and human aspects of God's creation. His was truly a creation care.

Fr. Kureethadam highlights how Pope Francis aligns his thinking with that of his papal predecessors. He notes Saint Pope John Paul II's call for a "global ecological conversion" and the need to "safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology (Cf. *LS* 5)." Francis also appreciates the so-called "green pope" Benedict XV's introduction of the concept of an integral approach which recognizes "'the book of nature is one and indivisible,' and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations, and so forth (Cf. *LS* 6)." Additionally, Fr. Kureethadam notes how Pope Francis looks to the East and embraces the contributions of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, known as the "green patriarch." Of particular interest is Bartholomew's notion of ecological sin: "to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God (Cf. *LS* 8)."

There is a unifying theme that serves as the *leitmotiv* of the texts of *LS* and of TGC. *On Care for Our Common Home* is in fact the subtitle of the encyclical and the concept that provides the foundational purpose for Pope Francis' encyclical. Fr. Kureethadam wisely employs this same concept to effectively link the chapters of TGC. By using this notion of "our common home," Pope Francis invites his readers to see earth not simply as a planet of resources to be used and exploited, but rather as our dwelling place. And, as we care for our personal homes, Pope Francis challenges us to be good stewards and caretakers of our common dwelling place on earth. *LS* recognizes that we are all unique individuals, so our responsibilities towards our planet-home will be differentiated according to our unique abilities and roles in life (TGC, 25).

Perhaps the most significant insight that Pope Francis highlights in *LS* is his notion that "our common home" does not simply refer to our

environmental home, but equally to our social home — i.e., our human society. Interestingly, the English translation of *LS* is entitled: *Encyclical on Climate Change and Inequality: On Care for Our Common Home*. Fr. Kureethadam helpfully points out that the word "climate" is mentioned 14 times in *LS*, while "the poor" is found 59 times. We find the linking word "creation" 66 times (TGC, 37). Pope Francis is clearly integrating the concepts of environmental justice and social justice in *LS*.

This integration is captured by the phrase "integral ecology." In *LS* Pope Francis points to the human causes and effects of the abuse of both the environment and the poor. Both are in many ways powerless in the face of exploitation by the rich and powerful. The pope illustrates how the abuse of the environment is also an abuse of the poor in the example of the plight of "climate migrants" who must move about in the search of fresh water to maintain their existence (TGC, 41).

However, as Fr. Kureeethadam is quick to point out, Pope Francis' message does not end with the recognition of the planetary crisis and the peril which humanity faces because of it. Instead, the Holy Father develops a response to the crisis and challenges his readers to a change of lifestyle to decrease the enormous stresses that humanity is currently placing on the resources of our common home, planet earth. We are invited to assume "the gaze of the earthly Jesus" as we encounter God's creation in each of its many manifestations (TGC, 70-1). This Christological starting point can be the impetus for a new *metanoia* regarding our relationship to the earth and to God's creation universally. Pope Francis encourages the embracing of an ecological spirituality — one that is characterized by moderation and even a sense of asceticism.

After reading and reflecting upon Fr. Kureethadam's TGC, I have come to see Pope Francis' encyclical as an important examination of conscience for twenty-first century Christians. Solidly founded on the traditional Catholic theological teachings on the trinitarian, incarnational and sacramental bases of our faith, the Holy Father extends the tradition to include the formation of healthy spiritual habits regarding the environment. Fr. Kureethadam finds seven ecological virtues in *LS* and concludes his text with their exposition. "Praise of God," "gratitude," "care," "justice," "work," "sobriety," and "humility" are the virtues which can shape us into persons ready and willing to do our part in assisting our fellow humans to treat planet earth as our sacred abode and not as a mere marketplace of exploitation of nature and the poor of the world. Reading and reflecting on Fr. Kureethadam's TGC is indeed a profound experience of spiritual formation regarding our relationship

to God's creation, as it is found in both nature and humanity.

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BECOMING NEW: FINDING GOD WITHIN US AND IN CREATION
Anselm Grün, and Leonardo Boff
Orbis Books
Maryknoll New York: 2019

And Jesus said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old" (Matthew 13:52).

The above quotation from Matthew's Gospel is an apt description of this collection of short essays by two committed disciples and prolific authors who reflect on the presence of God. Grün, a Benedictine monk, brings his treasures from the Christian Scriptures, mystics, other ancient and classic spiritual writers, with a touch of Carl Jung, to ponder how it is possible to discover and understand the presence of God within human beings. Boff, a noted Brazilian theologian, engages contemporary cosmology and evolutionary theory to explore how the universe and creation itself is a discoverable locus for the presence of God. Though the essays are not a dialogue between the two authors, it seems clear that they are aware of each other's work and make efforts to relate their approaches where appropriate.

In the first part of the book, Grün makes his case that God is "born" in human beings and then uses a series of metaphors to describe this indwelling presence as the healing power in us, the divine that unifies us with ourselves, the room of stillness within us, and of course, love. His language is often figurative as he grapples with the help of his sources to describe that which is ultimately ineffable and at the same time closer to us than we are to ourselves.

In the second part of the book, Boff takes a necessarily more systematic approach to his topic. First he briefly introduces the readers to pertinent aspects of contemporary cosmology and evolutionary theory, proceeding step by step to show how these sciences can help us to reimagine and rethink God's presence to us. While he retains much of the language of these sciences, his presentation also takes a more figurative turn as he grapples with the same inexpressible reality as Grün, namely, the divine mystery.

If there is a point of convergence in their approaches, it seems to be in Boff's essay, "A Prerequisite to Experiencing God in the Universe: The Liberation of "'Sensible Reason' (p.109-112)." In this essay, he contrasts the analytic reason of science to the sensible reason of the heart,

stating, "Here emerges spirituality. Spirituality is more than thinking about God. It means to feel God in our deepest inner being (109)." This is clearly resonant with Grün's treatment.

This text is a deceptively easy read. Probably it is best to read it slowly, lest the value of the treasures brought forth from the old and the new slip through the fingers of our minds, hearts, and imaginations. The treasures are meant to be lingered upon, and in that lingering it may be that the presence of God may be (re)discovered.

Joseph J. Fortuna, S.T.D., Pastor
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Poetry

In Memoriam: Patricia Treece
By Joan Lerman

Beyond confines of linear time,
you wrote of the sanctified body even here on earth,
portraying the stories of those subsisting
solely on the Holy Eucharist;
of physical healing
after the prayers of a priest, the unassuming Father Seelos,
though long dead, appeared at the patient's side,
his smile from heaven.

Bewildered, a man says to the visitor at his door:
"How did you get here so quickly?"
A journey on foot to have taken hours
suddenly completed within minutes,
time disappearing
into itself …. paradoxes made possible
by the necessity of love.

Chronicles of the love found,
bestowed by the saints.

That was your library, your research,
and now …
your abode.

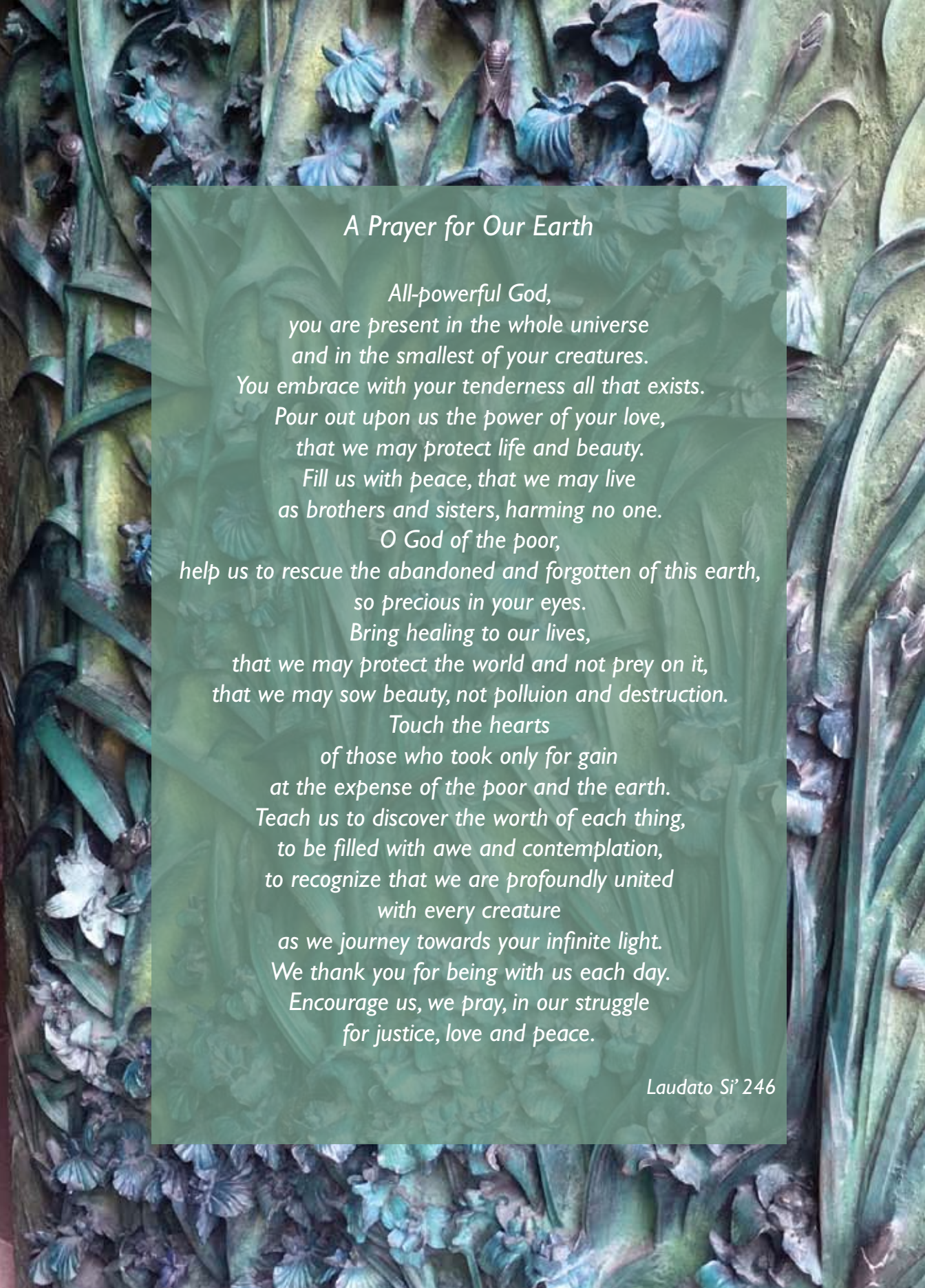
EUCHARISTIC WITNESS

Sr. Catherine Marie Carron, SSS

Waterville, Maine

"Your abiding presence, Lord, means life to me." These words of a popular Christian song just about say it all for me. I wondered where to begin this account. Perhaps with the faith of my parents and their simple but profound ways of expressing their love for the Blessed Sacrament and awakening mine… perhaps with childhood memories of short visits in an empty church… perhaps with consoling visits during the lonely times of adolescence… perhaps with the beauty of Holy Thursday repositories in my hometown churches (comparing them to one another of course as we went from place to place!!!). Perhaps I should begin with the silent hours of adoration in our convent chapel. More significantly yet, I could begin with the privilege of bringing communion to the homebound and the hospital in Albuquerque, New Mexico, when the faith of the sick (or lack of it) made a lasting impression upon me. Eucharist is fire, the fire of love and how could the eucharistic ministers' role of giving communion not make a lasting impression? Hands stretched out in faith, beautiful hands, young hands, old hands, gnarled hands, workers hands, all of us reaching out together to be fed by our loving Lord. The faith of the community connects with my own and gives it new life.

So much for the past, what about the present? On a daily basis we are bombarded with the chaos of the world we live in. The daily paper brings accounts of murder, crime, dishonesty, and confusion. What next? To me, the daily Eucharist is the counterweight to it all. How powerful and alive these words become now at every Eucharist: *Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, give us peace.* All is well.



A Prayer for Our Earth

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not polluion and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who took only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

Laudato Si' 246