



Reflections on Care for Creation

**This booklet is a collaborative effort between the
St. Joseph Justice Center and the Center for Spiritual Development.**

**These reflections, selected from the daily CSD Reflections,
demonstrate our appreciation and care for our common home.**

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INSTRUMENTS OF GOD

By Julie Mussché

"All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents." Pope Francis, Laudato Sí, 14



A brief return to the Sahara for an introduction, at the time of our journey in 1978, the region we were travelling through was undergoing significant environmental changes. Of significance was the advancing desertification into the Sahel, a transition zone between the Sahara and the tropical Savannah. Nearly fifty years ago, the impact of what we now call climate change was already being realized resulting in deteriorating agricultural and grazing lands, thirst and hunger, and displacement of people. One of the most impacted communities were the Tuareg, a nomadic people known for their navigating skills along Saharan trade routes. Overtime, climate shifts, the oil industry and resulting industrialization and colonialism all helped to rupture the social and structural support of the Tuareg.

Coming back to the present, during the catastrophic wind event that fueled the recent fires and disaster in Southern California, while passing by one of the weather stations in my home, I was startled by the relative humidity reading, 2 percent. Incredulous, this level of moisture in the air is comparable to Atacama and Sahara Deserts. Never recalling numbers that low, and anticipating another round of Santa Ana winds tomorrow as I write this reflection, it is clear that something significant has changed.

Where do we go from here? What is our responsibility to care for creation? And, in the face of weather-related disaster after disaster, how are we called to care for one another and all living creatures? "What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up... What need does the earth have of us?" (Laudato Sí, 160)



Reflection

How do you feel called to care for creation?

What help can God provide you to follow that call?

In Our Hearts

Compassionate Lord, we pray for those who have been devastated by recent natural disasters. We remember those who have lost their lives so suddenly. We hold in our hearts the families forever changed by grief and loss. Bring them consolation and comfort. Surround them with our prayer for strength. Bless those who have survived and heal their memories of trauma and devastation. May they have the courage to face the long road of rebuilding ahead.

We ask your blessing on all those who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, their security and their hope. Bless the work of relief agencies and those providing emergency assistance. May their work be guided by the grace and strength that comes from You alone.

Help us to respond with generosity in prayer, in assistance, in aid to the best of our abilities. Keep our hearts focused on the needs of those affected, even after the crisis is over. We ask this in Jesus' name.



THE EARTH WEEPS

By Julie Mussché

Dear Reader,

This reflection was originally published September 2022 and yet seems so timely with coastlines and islands being impacted more severely each year by rising seas. Let us pray and act with intention in our care for creation.

"All of creation is a song of praise to God." Hildegard of Bingen



Have you ever viewed a glacier up close? They are incredibly beautiful. While I had seen glaciers from a distance as a child, during an excursion through the Alps forty plus years ago, I was able to view the Aletsch Glacier up close. I was amazed at the variety of colors that the ice crystals in a glacier reflect. From azure, to turquoise, to robin's egg blue, it's quite remarkable. Given another chance to glimpse a glacier up close in 2004, I visited the Mendenhall Glacier while on a trip to Alaska. That was equally as breathtaking to view. Then, fifteen years later, while on a visit back to Alaska, I was shocked to see how far the Mendenhall had retreated.

Glacial melt is a global phenomenon. Perhaps the most significant example is Greenland. Flying over Greenland to and from Europe across four decades, the diminishing ice sheet is visible. "Glaciers are melting faster, losing 31 percent more snow and ice that they did 15 years earlier." (*The Associated Press*, April 28, 2021) Most of us are aware of the rising ocean waters and increasing coastal erosion as a result of glacial melt. Another significant aspect of snow and ice surface loss is that it will exponentially impact global warming. You see, snow and ice reflect radiating energy back into space. This is called the albedo effect. Simply put, without as much snow and ice, the planet will heat up more rapidly.

Another existential impact, glaciers and glacial melt provide fresh water for a significant portion of the planet. Many of the glacial fed rivers that offer drinking water also serve as transportation routes for travel and commerce. The Aletsch Glacier mentioned previously could disappear by the end of the century. This mass of snow and ice feeds the Massa River, a confluence of the Rhone River.

As someone who loves our mother, the earth and the gift of creation, I'm heartbroken and frightened by how dramatically the evidence of climate change is upon us. While we stand at a crossroads, all is not lost. As Pope Francis offers in *Laudato Si*, "The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know things can change. The Creator does not abandon us, he never forsakes his loving plan... Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home." Now is the time, the call to ecological conversion is a clarion one. May God guide and bless us in this endeavor.

Reflection

What gives you concern regarding climate change?

How do you feel called by the Spirit to take action?

Where is God for you in this moment of need?

A Prayer for Our Earth (Excerpted)

O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*



WRAPPED IN THE ORDINARY

By Julie Mussché

A Quote

"I wouldn't recommend using a tree for a spiritual guide all the days of one's life, but that sycamore got me through a long stretch of barrenness. It was only a little tree, and I didn't know it was holy until I spent time with it. Truly, holiness comes wrapped in the ordinary."

MACRINA WIEDERKEHR, "A TREE FULL OF ANGELS"

Reflection

Past reflections have introduced you to "Art" the artichoke. Art is actually pretty amazing, having lived well beyond the life expectancy of most artichoke plants. Art was moved and transplanted over twenty years ago, and has provided a crop every year. This year was tough for Art, with the unprecedented heat last summer, and then, our gardener and I uncovered a break in the sprinkler line which left Art without water for who knows how long. The good news: the discovery was made during the dormant period, and so Art had been cut back to lay fallow. Yet, I wondered if Art was going to make it, looking more lifeless than in the past.

During late autumn, I started to visit Art more regularly to check in on how things were going. The stump that was Art looked "deader than a doornail." Beginning to worry and wonder if Art needed a proper burial, I asked the gardener to check the plant's vitals -- all was well, it was just a matter of waiting and hoping. One day about a week ago, while visiting Art, I noticed green sprouts breaking through.

All of this invited me to reflect on the gift of hope. This example of a seemingly trivial event might give pause in the midst of all that is going on in the world. Yet, sparks of hope can brighten the broad course of life experience. Some things to consider -- do you view the world around you and circumstances from a posture of hope? Recognizing that our attitudes are conditioned by multiple factors -- personality, family origin, life challenges and losses as well as gifts -- do you tend toward hope or cynicism? For me, it depends.

Serendipitously, with all of these contemplative machinations, during the Christmas Eve Midnight Mass broadcast from the Vatican, Pope Francis heralded the Jubilee Celebration, Pilgrims of Hope and the Holy Year 2025. What an exciting moment in our time and church. February 2022, Pope Francis announced the Jubilee: "We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainly by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and foresighted vision." With a pilgrim's heart, the journey begins.



For Pondering

In addition to the considerations already offered, how do you define the virtue of hope?

How has hope sustained and inspired you?

Where in your life do you seek hope?



Art the Artichoke
Photo by Julie Mussché

For Prayer

The Jubilee Prayer
Father in heaven,
may the faith you have given us
in your son, Jesus Christ, our brother,
and the flame of charity enkindled
in our hearts by the Holy Spirit,
reawaken in us the blessed hope
for the coming of your Kingdom.

May your grace transform us
into tireless cultivators of the seeds of the Gospel.
May those seeds transform from within both humanity and the whole cosmos
in the sure expectation
of a new heaven and a new earth,
when, with the powers of Evil vanquished,
your glory will shine eternally.

May the grace of the Jubilee
reawaken in us, Pilgrims of Hope,
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.

May that same grace spread
the joy and peace of our Redeemer
throughout the earth.

To you our God, eternally blessed,
be glory and praise for ever.

Amen.

POPE FRANCIS



BLESSED ARE YOU

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's Gospel

Jesus came down with the Twelve and stood on a stretch of level ground with a great crowd of his disciples and a large number of the people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said:

"Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.
Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied.
Blessed are you who are now weeping, for you will laugh.
Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you, and denounce your name as evil on account of the Son of Man.
Rejoice and leap for joy on that day! Behold, your reward will be great in heaven. For their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way.

But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are filled now, for you will be hungry.
Woe to you who laugh now, for you will grieve and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the false prophets in this way."

LUKE 6:17, 20-26





Reflection

Just before this event, Luke tells us that Jesus had spent the night on the mountain in prayer, and in the morning, he chose his disciples, the “Twelve.” Together they came down to a stretch of level ground. Before a multitude of people from other regions, Jesus gave what has been called the “Sermon on the Plain” (in contrast to Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7).

Gazing on his disciples, he said four sayings beginning with Blessed...

My first thought is, what is the meaning of “Blessed?” In the Hebrew Scriptures, we hear God blessing the animals, a sign of God’s delight in the life of these creatures: they can grow and multiply! God blesses humankind with happiness and well-being. In Sr. Christine Hilliard’s words, “Divine blessing is the action of God – something done to the recipient.” It is as if God is saying, “Whatever you need for wholeness is my gift to you!” Maybe that is what I do every morning when I come into my office and walk up to my blooming African violet and bless it with delight.

Returning to the passage from Luke above, Jesus raises his eyes to the disciples and says, “*Blessed are you!*” He would have been seated and his gaze would have rested on those he had chosen to carry on his message: *Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.* Jesus is speaking to the materially poor who struggle each day to survive. He is speaking to the billions of people who suffer without food and housing and home, without healthcare and jobs and dignity. Jesus affirms all who are languishing and says, *I am with you, and I will give you a place in God’s kingdom.* Jesus continues to bless and affirm those who are hungry and starving now and promises that they will be satisfied. He blesses and encourages those who are weeping, grieving and bowed down with sorrow. Jesus will lift them up and give them comfort. Jesus’ fourth blessing is for those who are hated or excluded or denounced because they walk in Jesus’ Way, for justice and peace. Anyone who stands up for the nonviolent Way of Jesus will be rewarded and honored in heaven.

As the Sermon on the Plain continues, Jesus addresses others with four woes: *But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.* Jesus follows in the line of prophets: proclaiming the Good News and denouncing those whose wealth oppresses the poor and downtrodden. Woe to you who are filled, woe to you who laugh, woe to you when all speak well of you.... Jesus turns their world upside-down. Being rich when so many are desperate or being overly satisfied while so many are starving or being extravagantly entertained while so many are being crushed by grief under unjust practices: this is why Jesus came to show us God's reign of universal love.

Consciousness Examen and Pondering

Yesterday I was struck with deep sorrow when I saw a long line of handcuffed immigrants marching toward a military plane with only the clothes on their backs and without their family, headed for Guatemala. I cried within, "Blessed are you, blessed are you! May you be comforted and consoled by Jesus Christ in this time of great sorrow."

As you ponder the above Gospel and reflection, what is stirring in your inward being? What is your prayer?



For Prayer

Beatitudes for Modern Christians

Blessed are those who remain faithful while enduring evils inflicted on them by others and forgive them from their heart.

Blessed are those who look into the eyes of the abandoned and marginalized and show them their closeness.

Blessed are those who see God in every person and strive to make others also discover him.

Blessed are those who protect and care for our common home.

Blessed are those who renounce their own comfort in order to help others.

Blessed are those who pray and work for full communion between Christians.

All these are messengers of God's mercy and tenderness, and surely they will receive from him their merited reward.

POPE FRANCIS

"AM I MY BROTHER'S GUARDIAN?"

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's First Reading

The man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have produced a man with the help of the LORD." Next, she bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the soil. In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not. Cain greatly resented this and was crestfallen. So, the LORD said to Cain: "Why are you so resentful and crestfallen? If you do well, you can hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master."

Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let us go out in the field." When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the LORD asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" He answered, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" The LORD then said: "What have you done! Listen: your brother's blood cries out to me from the soil! Therefore, you shall be banned from the soil that opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. If you till the soil, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a restless wanderer on the earth."

Cain said to the LORD: "My punishment is too great to bear. Since you have now banished me from the soil, and I must avoid your presence and become a restless wanderer on the earth, anyone may kill me at sight." "Not so!" the LORD said to him. "If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged sevenfold." So the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest anyone should kill him at sight.

Adam again had relations with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she called Seth. "God has granted me more offspring in place of Abel," she said, "because Cain slew him."

GENESIS 4:1-15, 25



Reflection

In the story of the beginning of humankind we see one brother turn against his brother. Cain, the firstborn, was the tiller of the soil and Abel, the younger brother, was the keeper of the sheep. In time, they both wanted to offer the LORD a gift of their labor: Cain gave the first fruits of the soil and Abel gave the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. As the story unfolds, the LORD preferred the gift of Abel over the gift of Cain, and this led Cain to hold resentment against his younger brother. The LORD saw the disappointment in Cain and conversed with him, trying to help Cain realize that temptation was crouching at the door of his heart, and that Cain could be the master of this evil thought. The LORD cared about Cain's hurt feelings and tried to help him look at the situation differently.

After Cain killed his brother in the field, the LORD asked him, "Where is your brother?" This was not a question about the location of Abel, but a question of concern for Cain's innocent next of kin. Cain's flippant answer showed his disregard for his brother, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The response from the Creator was "Listen, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground!" Then followed the punishment to Cain that the soil would no longer give its strength to him. A repentant Cain later asked the LORD for protection.

For Pondering

In this story of the first murder, I often think of the words of our Creator saying to Cain and to us, "Listen, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground ... which opened its mouth to receive his blood from your hand." How many times has the sacred ground of Mother Earth received the blood of innocent people in wars and famines and disasters caused by climate change and by a disregard for the fate of our innocent brothers and sisters and those who follow us in the years to come? Can you hear the cry?



For Prayer



A Prayer for the World

Let the rain come and wash away the ancient
grudges, the bitter hatreds held
and nurtured over generations.

Let the rain wash away the memory of the hurt, the
neglect.

Then let the sun come out and fill the sky with
rainbows.

Let the warmth of the sun heal us wherever we are
broken.

Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each other
clearly.

So that we can see beyond labels, beyond accents,
gender or skin color.

Let the warmth and brightness of the sun melt our
selfishness.

So that we can share the joys and feel the sorrows of
our neighbors.

And let the light of the sun be so strong that we will
see all people as our neighbors.

Let the earth, nourished by rain, bring forth flowers to
surround us with beauty.

And let the mountains teach our hearts to reach
upward to heaven.

Amen.

RABBI HAROLD S. KUSHNER



PONDERING THE GIFT OF CREATION

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

In these autumn days, we notice the changes all around us as creation takes on a new vestido, a new garment. A few of my Haiku poems written in November 2012 capture the seasonal change here in Orange:



God first made creation about fourteen billion years ago...and God said that it was good, setting in motion the sacred flow of life pulsating throughout the entire universe, and eventually giving us our earthly home. Throughout many millennia, during the passage of time, evolutionary changes happened in the heavens above, and on earth below, marking the seasons with variations of climate, plant, and animal existence – all vibrating with the sacred flow of life from the Creator's hand.



While visiting Turkey in 2013, a group of us pilgrims were following in the footsteps of St. Paul. We arrived at the ancient city of Colossae, surprised to see only a mound remaining. Standing there in silence, I pondered what rested beneath our feet. Later, I expressed the experience in these words:

Colossae – a mound
sun-kissed pottery shards
tell ancient stories

planted in the earth
a city remains beneath
pulsating with life

God-fearing peoples
dwelt here eons gone by –
hearts searching the Holy



Mound at Colossae by Sr. Jeanne Fallon



For Prayer

As we ponder the gift of God's creation in this present age, we are invited to take in the reality of the autumnal changes we observe all around us and allow a prayer of gratitude to arise in our hearts. We are here in this present moment in this sacred place in the Presence of our beloved Creator who birthed us. Let us pray...

Sacred Ground, Sacred Silence

The leaves slowly float to the ground on the wings of the breeze
Welcomed by the very ground on which I stand
The very soil from which they sprang
And are now returning.

I stand and stare into the distance visible between the leaves
Leaning on my staff, carved from a fallen pine bough
Shaped by rock and stream of my passage
Smooth by the years of use:

Dappled, dappled is the sunshine on my pathway, sculpted by bough
and branch
Pools of shadow wait for me to explore them, and listen,
Listen to the silence for what it has to tell me
Listen to the still small voice of the breeze.
Slowly, slowly I hear, and see, understand, and finally know
I have been, am, and always will be nurtured in oneness
Bourn aloft by all that is, in its very isness
All that I must do is be accepting.

Lord, give me the grace, and peace, and attention to your Presence
In each dying leaf, each dying, each pool of shadow
That dapples my life, illumines my days
Embraces me with invitation.

Help me to daily find eternity both in the great distances between the
mountains
And in the great intimacy of my next step
From one small piece of holy ground
To the next.

Amen.

DAVID BROWN
Used with permission



"MAY THE LORD BE GLAD IN HIS WORKS"

By Sister Jane DeLisle, CSJ

Today's Responsorial Psalm

May the Lord be glad in his works.

PSALM 104:31



Reflection

The readings today present an iconic view of God at work within the world. Today begins with God's works of creation. After creating an aspect of the world, God delights in what was created. Since God is love, all is created out of love; for love. I take delight in the poetic words of Genesis. "And God saw how good it was. Evening came, and morning followed..." God savored all that was done in love.

In this Jubilee Year of Hope, as designated by Pope Francis, may we look at all we do each day in love and be able to savor and proclaim, "God saw how good it was." There is so much we are invited to do, to savor, to proclaim of God's good work done by each one of us through the influence of the Holy Spirit. It is good to stop and ponder the "works of our hands" made in God's image and likeness.

God's abiding love and presence surges within us, and delights in the good we strive to do. Moments of reflection on our activities and ways of being present to another allow us to recognize God at work within and the good that spills out into the world -- to rejoice in all that is beautiful. And we also reflect on the unintentional and sometimes intentional harm we have done. Here forgiveness is waiting -- and a resolve to be truer to God's ways tomorrow.

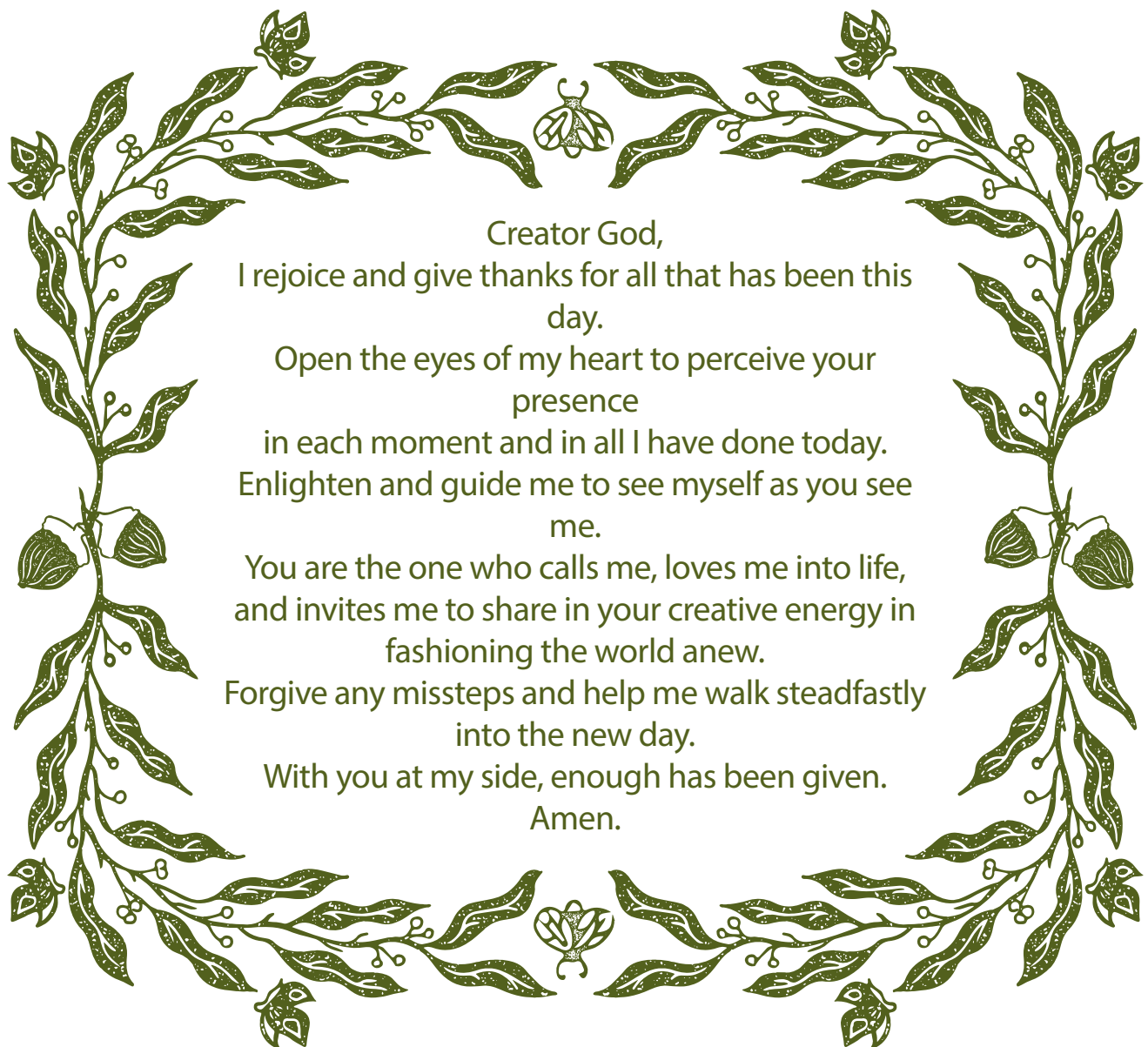
Pondering all that has been each day keeps me in the flow of grace and in the truth of who God is in and for me. Remember, I am made by Love to be love in this world. At day's end I remember the activities and my attitude during the day just spent. I give thanks and delight. I also recall and acknowledge difficulty. I claim my part, I ask for pardon, and I ask for what I need to be my best self tomorrow. Then, with God at home in me, I see how good it was.

For Pondering

How did you encounter God today?

In God's presence, review your activities and your way of being yesterday. Name the good given and received. Give thanks! Savor reality. Name the moments of difficulty. What are you drawn to do? Discern your part. Ask forgiveness. Seek God's help.

For Prayer



Creator God,
I rejoice and give thanks for all that has been this
day.

Open the eyes of my heart to perceive your
presence
in each moment and in all I have done today.
Enlighten and guide me to see myself as you see
me.

You are the one who calls me, loves me into life,
and invites me to share in your creative energy in
fashioning the world anew.

Forgive any missteps and help me walk steadfastly
into the new day.

With you at my side, enough has been given.
Amen.

WONDERFUL CREATOR

By Alicia M. Rodriguez

Today's Responsorial Psalm

You have given your Son rule over the works of your hands.

O LORD, our Lord, how glorious is your name over all the earth!

What is man that you should be mindful of him, or the son of man that you should care for him?

You have made him little less than the angels, and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him rule over the works of your hands, putting all things under his feet.

All sheep and oxen, yes, and the beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and whatever swims the paths of the seas.

PSALM 8:2, 5-9



Reflection

Today's responsorial psalm makes me think of the times I have been out in nature and was reminded of how wonderful everything was created. It also reminds me of how spoiled I am that God chose to share this beauty with me. Oftentimes I have had a hard time sharing my emotions with others and I have continuously been trying to open up with others more throughout the last few years. I have found that through nature it has become easier to share my raw emotions with others, primarily through sitting with people and watching the sunset.

There is something so intimate about watching the sunset that at times, it makes me want to smile and laugh, and other times it makes me want to cry. As the sun fades I get to see an explosion of colors in the sky that highlight powerful waves in the ocean that extends vast before me. I have a cautious love for the ocean: as much as I love it, I am also reminded of the immense power it possesses. While it has the ability to take me to new places, it also has the ability to crush me with its force. I remember one sunset I sat there just watching the waves crash against the rocks and hearing the mighty roar that came with every crash. It made me feel really small in the world and made me realize that I have barely scratched the surface of all the beauty that this world has to offer.

Earlier this week, I went to the same beach that I have been going to for years to look at the sunset and was once again reminded of the power of the waves. At this specific beach there is an area that is sandy and has a nice place to take pictures. When I recently went to visit I noticed that a large chunk of the cliff had fallen off and, along with the erosion that the crashing waves provided, the landscape had completely changed and was rough to walk on. I wonder how many times a piece of me has fallen or I have been eroded by differing circumstances that have changed me? I wonder if sometimes these circumstances that change me are also meant to help others see the goodness of God working through me?

I am a creation of God, who made me through love.



For Pondering

When was the last time that I stopped to thank God for creating me and loving me as I am? What are some ways that I can better love myself for being as I am? When was the last time I stopped to smell the roses and appreciate the wonderful views God has given us? How do these views make me feel?

For Prayer

With Your hands You created me
with tenderness, love and care.
Those same hands that made the
exploding stars in the sky and the
powerful seas. Those hands that
created the mountains and
deserts and all that surrounds me.

I thank you, Most Wonderful
Creator, for taking your time in
creating me. Please allow me to
see myself as You see me.

Amen.

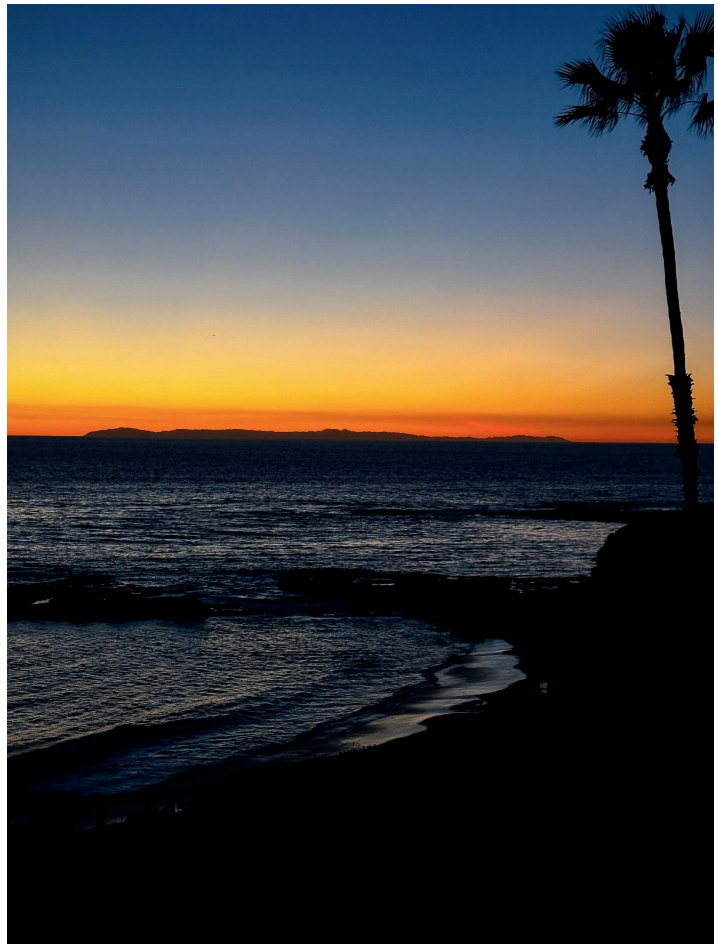


Photo by Alicia Rodriguez

FEAST OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (2022)

By Sister Kit Gray, CSJ

Introduction

The Season of Creation—September 1st through October 4, celebrated by Christians around the world as a time for renewing, repairing, and restoring our relationship to God, one another, and all of creation—ends today on the Feast of Francis of Assisi. Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals and environment, could be viewed as the original Season of Creation advocate. His devotion to God was expressed through his love for all of God's creation. St. Francis of Assisi, (1181-1226), was the founder of the Franciscan orders of the Friars Minor, the Poor Clares, and the lay Third Order. He was also a leader of the movement of evangelical poverty in the early 13th century. His evangelical zeal, consecration to poverty, charity, and personal charisma drew thousands of followers. Francis' devotion to the human Jesus and his desire to follow Jesus' example reflected and reinforced important developments in medieval spirituality. In 1979 Pope John Paul II recognized him as the patron saint of ecology.





For Prayer

Canticle of the Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.
Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your
love, and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

FRANCIS OF ASSISI



PROTECTORS OF GOD'S HANDIWORK

By Sister Kit Gray, CSJ

Introduction

The Season of Creation, September 1st through October 4th, is celebrated by Christians around the world as a time for renewing, repairing, and restoring our relationship to God, one another, and all of creation. Because this celebration ends tomorrow, I offer a few quotes from Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si, On the Care of our Common Home* for thought and prayer today.



Quotes from Pope Francis

"We must realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

"We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it."

"We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family."

"We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental."

"The earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters."

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

For Pondering

How have you been aware of the Season of Creation?

What aspect of the natural world is most compelling for you—earth, air, wind, fire?

How do you experience the reality that we are “one single family”?

What do the recent experiences of flooding in Pakistan, the heat wave in the United States, the effects of Hurricanes Fiona and Ian say to you?

What is most challenging in the Pope’s words?

For Prayer



O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with
all living things,
our brothers the animals (and all creatures)
to whom you gave the earth as their home in common
with us.

We remember with shame that in the past
we have exercised the high dominion of humans with
ruthless cruelty
so that the voice of the earth,
which should have gone up to you in song,
has been a groan of travail.

May we realize that all creatures live not for us alone
but for themselves and for you, and that they love the
sweetness of life.

BASIL THE GREAT

The Seed is the Word of God

By Sister Kit Gray, CSJ

Reflection Before the Scripture Passage:

Are you a gardener? Do you live with someone who is tending a garden? What are your observations about seeds, soil, water, sunlight, and other factors that determine the harvest?

LUKE 8:4–15

When a large crowd gathered, with people from one town after another journeying to Jesus, he spoke in a parable.

“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path and was trampled, and the birds of the sky ate it up. Some seed fell on rocky ground, and when it grew, it withered for lack of moisture. Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew with it and choked it. And some seed fell on good soil, and when it grew, it produced fruit a hundredfold.”

After saying this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear ought to hear.” Then his disciples asked him what the meaning of this parable might be. He answered, “Knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of God has been granted to you; but to the rest, they are made known through parables so that they may look but not see, and hear but not understand.

“This is the meaning of the parable. The seed is the word of God. Those on the path are the ones who have heard, but the Devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts that they may not believe and be saved. Those on rocky ground are the ones who, when they hear, receive the word with joy, but they have no root; they believe only for a time and fall away in time of temptation. As for the seed that fell among thorns, they are the ones who have heard, but as they go along, they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life, and they fail to produce mature fruit. But as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.”





REFLECTION AFTER THE READING:

What word or phrase stands out for you?



Thoughts on the Reading

I live with a Sister who has been tending a garden for several months. Watching her plant, water, fertilize, weed, and deter “critters” interested in the developing plants, as well as enjoying the fruits of her labor, has given me a greater appreciation for this parable. Jesus explains the meaning of the parable for his disciples—and for us.

The seed is the word of God—Jesus himself.

The sower is God the Father.

The sower scatters seed generously—even, according to the parable, without apparent regard for choosing the optimum conditions for the seed to take root.

The seed falls on the path, on rocky ground, among thorns, and on good, rich soil.

The seed that fell on good soil “produced fruit a hundredfold.”

Jesus concludes the parable by saying that “as for the seed that fell on rich soil, they are the ones who, when they have heard the word, embrace it with a generous and good heart, and bear fruit through perseverance.”

As I said earlier, I have been observing what it takes for a garden to flourish—it takes work; Jesus says it takes “perseverance.” Fertilizing, watering, and weeding help soil to be good and rich, a place where the seed can take root, grow, and “produce a hundredfold.” Even with that preparation, the tender shoots often need stakes to support their growth and protection from snails, squirrels, and other predators. A “rich harvest” is not guaranteed even with a lot of work.



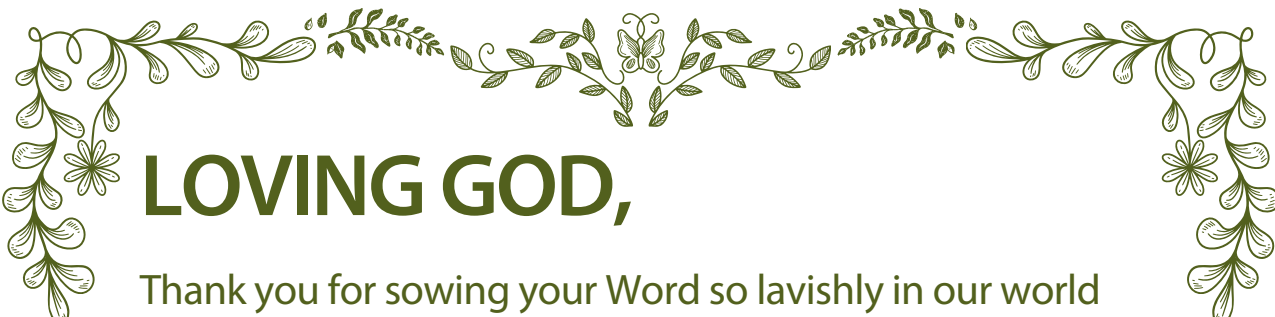
Reflection Questions

What needs weeding, watering, or fertilizing in my heart to make it more “good soil,” receptive to the Word of God?

What has worn away my perseverance in hearing and responding to the Word of God?

What fruits of the Word of God have I seen in my life?

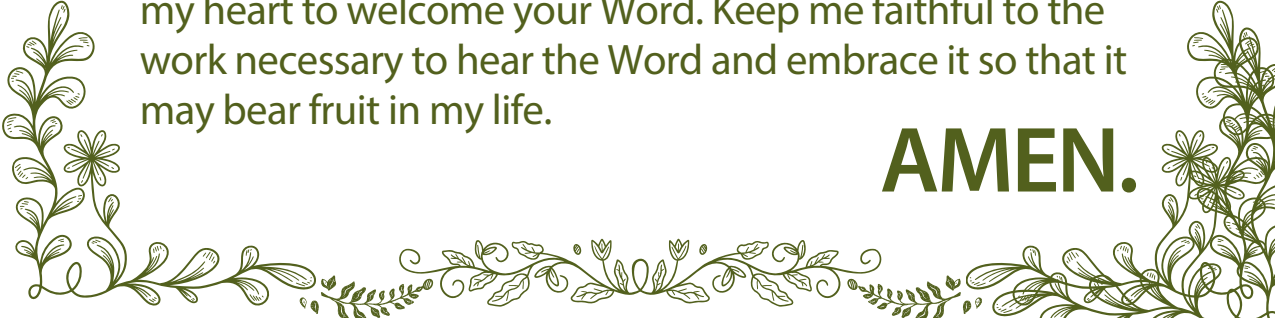
For Prayer

A decorative border of green leaves and small flowers framing the top and sides of the prayer text.

LOVING GOD,

Thank you for sowing your Word so lavishly in our world and in my life. Help me to continue to prepare the soil of my heart to welcome your Word. Keep me faithful to the work necessary to hear the Word and embrace it so that it may bear fruit in my life.

AMEN.

A decorative border of green leaves and small flowers framing the bottom and sides of the prayer text.

"I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES"

By Elisabeth Beall

An Excerpt from Today's Gospel

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.
He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit,
and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit.
You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you."
JOHN 15:1-4



Reflection

There are two kinds of people when it comes to gardening: the person who celebrates a "volunteer" tomato plant that has cropped up unexpectedly ... and the person who uproots it, because it didn't belong there in the first place.

I've always taken a "more the merrier" approach in the garden (which is how, one year, we ended up with 14 cucumber and nearly 30 tomato plants). But the more time I've spent in the garden, the more clearly I see that allowing the plants to run rampant doesn't do anybody any favors. Planting too many seedlings doesn't give any of them the space they need to grow, and the ability to absorb the nutrients they need. If a mature plant grows too tall or spreads too wide, it's at greater risk of being damaged – especially when the Santa Ana winds roar through our neighborhood.

Judicious pruning keeps the plants healthy. Growth is good – but it needs to be guided.

That's easy for a gardener to say, though – the gardener isn't the one getting a branch lopped off! I am not nearly so easy-going when I am the one being pruned and shaped and molded. It's not always a pleasure to accept constructive criticism from someone who loves me – how much tougher it is to break negative habits, put others' needs before my own, and open my heart to God's desire for my life!

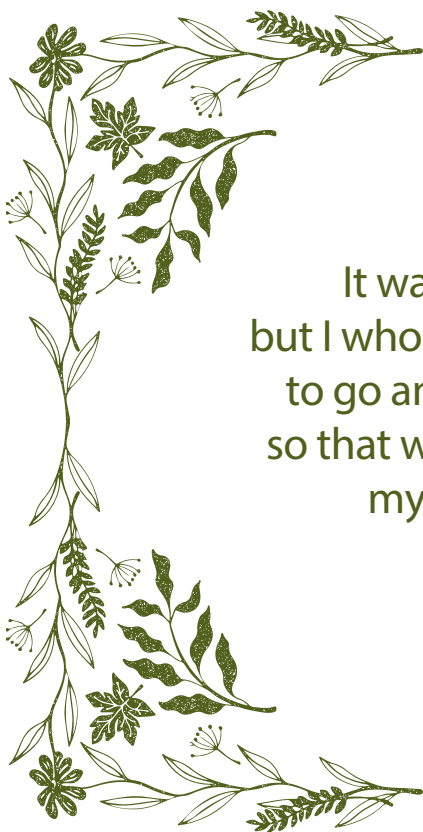
But that pruning is vital. Without it, how could I possibly become the person God created me to be?

I take comfort in the reminders in today's Gospel that each of us is a branch of God's vine – that God has nurtured us, and looked after us, and yes, pruned us. "By this is my Father glorified, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples" (John 15:8).

For Pondering

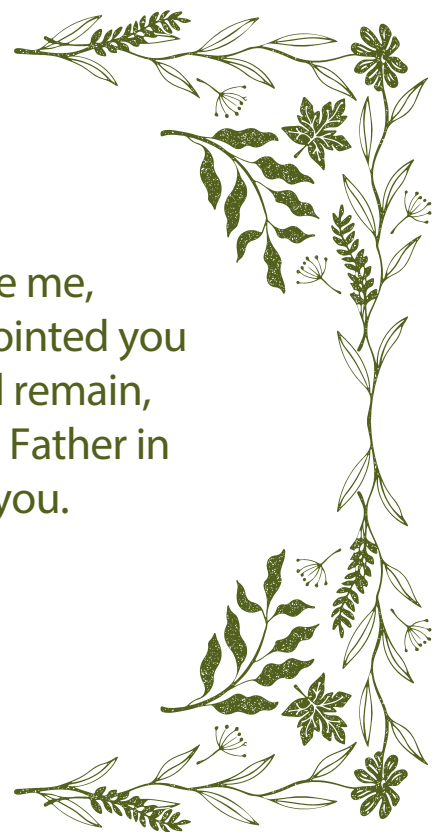
Recall a time when you felt God was "pruning" your branch. What was your response in that moment? Did your response change over time? How do you strive to become more fruitful in God's vineyard? What spiritual practices could be helpful to you as you prune your own branch?

For Prayer



It was not you who chose me,
but I who chose you and appointed you
to go and bear fruit that will remain,
so that whatever you ask the Father in
my name he may give you.

JOHN 15:16



GOD'S GIFT

By Elisabeth Beall

An Excerpt from Today's Gospel

"I have given them the glory you gave me,
so that they may be one, as we are one,
I in them and you in me,
that they may be brought to perfection as one,
that the world may know that you sent me,
and that you loved them even as you loved me.
Father, they are your gift to me."
JOHN 17:22-24



Reflection

My parents are at an age where, periodically, they like to talk about what I'll need to do after they've died. These are very practical, hands-on reminders – where I'll be able to locate various family valuables, where the important paperwork is, what kind of music is desired at the funeral.

It's not fun lunchtime conversation, from my point of view, but even so, I have to admit that it's very sweet of them to worry about me, and how I will handle everything that needs handling on their behalf, after they're gone. They want to give me as much help as they can ... while they can!

That's what we do for the people we love. We worry about them. We try to take care of them. We work to set things up for their success. And that's just what Jesus is doing in this reading, a long petition to his Father to care for Jesus's followers. This chapter comes after several focusing on Jesus's last days – his entry into Jerusalem, his washing of the Apostles' feet, the Last Supper. In the next chapter, Jesus will be arrested and Peter will deny knowing him. Jesus knows the end of his earthly life is near, and yet he is praying for the welfare of his friends, his disciples – current and future. He looks ahead to his life in the resurrection, praying that the people he loves will be there with him – and that they will at last see him in the fullness of his glory as the Son of God. "Father," he says, "they are your gift to me."

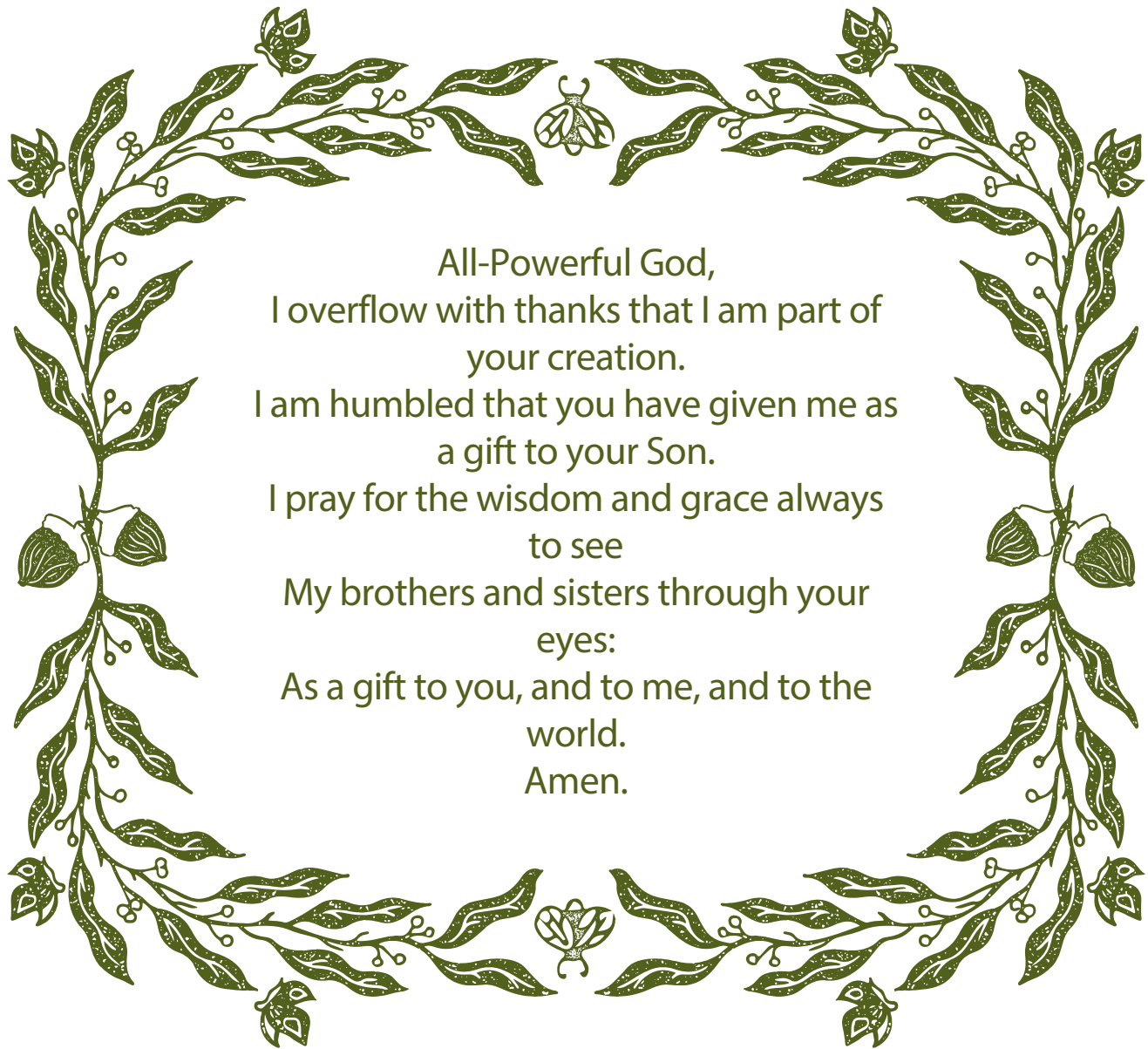
It's a remarkable thing for Jesus to say, since he is God's greatest gift to us – to all the world. That's an act of generosity we often reflect on – but there's another one we often brush aside. For just as we are a gift to Jesus and he is a gift to us, so are we all gifts to each other. Let us go into this day with that knowledge at the forefront of our minds, and treat each other as precious and remarkable gifts from -- and to -- our most generous Creator.

For Pondering

Re-read the words: "Father, they are your gift to me." How does it make you feel to know Jesus views you as a gift he has received? How does that impact the way you view yourself?

As Jesus and the Father are in one another, Jesus prays that we may also be in both of them. How would your outlook change if you not only believed that God was in you ... but that you were also in God? How would this impact the way you move through each day?

For Prayer



All-Powerful God,
I overflow with thanks that I am part of
your creation.
I am humbled that you have given me as
a gift to your Son.
I pray for the wisdom and grace always
to see
My brothers and sisters through your
eyes:
As a gift to you, and to me, and to the
world.
Amen.

FEAST OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI (2024)

By Elisabeth Beall

Prayer of St. Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*



Reflection

I can't read or think of St. Francis' peace prayer without hearing in my head the melody composed by Sebastian Temple, adapting the prayer into the song, "Make Me A Channel of Your Peace." With its gentle repetition of the same note many times in a row, carrying along the beautiful words, it is a meditation that helps me calm angry or angry thoughts and recalibrate – a tool I find I need more frequently these days.

The Prayer of St. Francis is a beautiful rendering of our mission as Christians: to be a peaceful, loving presence in the world, to actively offer forgiveness and share hope, to love our neighbor as ourselves.

How often are we able to keep that mission at the forefront of our minds right now? How often do we really seek to understand others more than we seek to make ourselves understood? Do we really listen to others when they speak to us, or are we just counting the seconds till we can make our counter-argument and prove that we are right and they are wrong?

The story of how St. Francis saved a community from a fierce wolf provides a template for how we can strive to truly be instruments of peace. When St. Francis lived in the city of Gubbio, a wolf was terrorizing the countryside – devouring not only animals, but also people. So St. Francis sought out the animal, and called to him: “Come hither, Brother Wolf.” No surprise here – St. Francis befriended the wolf and struck a deal with him: the people would provide him with food, as long as he would promise never to kill another beast or person. Then St. Francis stretched out his hand, and the Wolf lifted up his paw and laid it in the saint's hand.

I see and hear it all around me, in people that I care for and respect – a fear of approaching the other, a reluctance to speak our truth and hear theirs, a hesitance in reaching out and building relationships. The people of Gubbio saw the wolf as a murderous monster, but St. Francis knew there was more to the story: he approached the animal, spoke to him openly, and offered him his hand in friendship.

That was a man approaching a fierce and wild animal. Should we not be less fearful of approaching our brothers and sisters who live and work side by side with us – but perhaps think differently or have opinions different from our own? Let us all strive to be a channel of peace in our homes, our workplaces, our communities – to stretch out a hand in loving welcome, to really see and hear the people around us, to strive more to love the dear neighbor than to be loved ourselves. It truly is in giving that we receive.



**Sculpture of Francis of Assisi with
Animals on River
Photo by Carlos Moura**

For Pondering

- Who is the wolf in your life? How can you reach out a loving hand and strive to build a relationship?
- We are all called to love the dear neighbor, which can sometimes take tremendous courage. Where in your life can you take brave steps to love the dear neighbor whose views may differ from your own?
- Reread the Prayer of St. Francis out loud, slowly. Which phrases sink deeply into your heart?

For Prayer



Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures;
especially Brother Sun, who is the day, and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,
and bears a likeness to You, Most High One.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars; in heaven You
formed them clear and precious and beautiful.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your
creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night;
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

FROM THE CANTICLE OF THE SUN



The reflections reprinted here originated with the Center for Spiritual Development, a ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange (CA). In the Spring of 2020, a team of writers at the Center for Spiritual Development began producing a series of Daily Reflections – and that series continues today. Each reflection is emailed to a list of subscribers, and also published on the CSD website (www.thecsd.org/dailyreflections).

To learn more about the Center for Spiritual Development, go to www.thecsd.org. To learn more about the Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange and their other sponsored ministries, go to www.csjorange.org.

