



As Franciscans, we consistently examine our relational understanding of creation. Looking to theologians like St. Bonaventure who developed a theological and spiritual vision that acknowledged all creation as emanating from the goodness of God, existing as a "footprint" of God, and leading us back to God if we are able to "read" nature properly. In order to assist you in your "reading" of nature, we offer you this guide, *40 Days; 40 Ways: A Guide to a Green Lent*, by Dianne Scheper.

The Franciscan emphasis on the goodness of God and creation has many ramifications. Creation is the outpouring of God's love into the universe. Creation reveals to us God's love for us and God's beauty which is why Franciscans call creation the mirror of God and that God has two books of creation—Sacred Scripture and creation.

Francis looked at life through the lens of all creation. He had a relational connection from which blossomed a perspective of deep empathy. He looked for ways to defend the environment according to the needs of each living being. Rather than viewing creation from 'anthropocentrism,' which literally means 'human-centered', Francis saw creation as 'biocentrism' which means 'life-centered.'

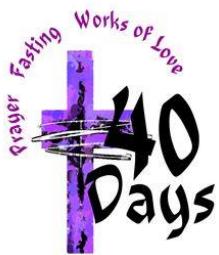
We have read through "40 Days; 40 Ways" and find it inspiring, thought provoking, and very Franciscan. The guide is designed to provide a green environmental context for you to consider this Lent. Despite its title, "40 Days; 40 Ways" is not fashioned as a daily devotional. Dianne describes it as "a range of suggestions for merging your Lenten disciplinary spirit with creation-centered activities." We hope you will consider challenging yourself with some creative action this Lent.

Patrick Carolan
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About the Author:

Dianne Scheper holds a Masters degree in literature from the University of Maryland and in the liberal arts from Johns Hopkins, as well as a doctorate in religious studies from The Catholic University, where she wrote her dissertation on the experience of the sacred in nature, focusing specifically on the writings of Annie Dillard. During the 90's she was a nature columnist for *Belles Lettres: A Review of Books by Women*. Since then, her research interests have focused on the interplay of religious and cultural values in contemporary world cultures and literature. For years she was active in liturgy planning for Corpus Christi Catholic Church in Baltimore, where she resides, and is currently a member of the Baltimore Shambhala Meditation Center. In her personal life, Dr. Scheper is a huge fan of books, theater, hiking in the woods, NPR and the National Parks.



40 Days; 40 Ways

A Guide to a Green Lent



Dianne Scheper, Ph.D.

Prologue

For Christians, the Lenten season can be both inspiring and also quite challenging, for it represents a disruption of our comfortable, everyday lives. This is as it should be for, after all, Lent is modeled on Christ's sojourn in the wilderness, where for 40 days he fasted, prayed, and struggled with temptations. These were not "comfortable" experiences, and neither are the traditional activities of Lent. It is a time of repentance and fasting, a time for self-examination and reflection. But the promise is, that if we take up these challenges, we will emerge from Lent leading a more authentic Christian life.

The following "40 Days; 40 Ways" is designed to provide a green environmental context for the traditional endeavors of Lent. Despite its title, "40 Days" is not fashioned as a daily devotional. Instead, it is a range of suggestions for merging your Lenten disciplinary spirit with creation-centered activities. Some of these suggestions are practical; some are spiritual; some are political. They are meant to inspire your thinking and prompt creative action. You may wish to follow one or three or none of them, depending on your interests and needs.

Walter Brueggemann, in his wonderful collection of Lenten devotions (*A Way Other Than Our Own*) says Lent represents "a question, a gift, and a summons," three calls of Lent that are interconnected. Lent calls us to question the direction of our lives—how we are spending our time and to what purpose. Through such self-reflection, we hear the summons to find a new, more authentic way of being-in-the-world, and that new way of being, freed from self-serving, get-ahead obsessions, can only be experienced as a "gift."

This call and these promises are at the heart of "40 Days." Many centuries ago, St. Augustine claimed that God has given us two books of revelation –the book of sacred scripture and the book of nature. Today, the natural world is in grave peril. Both for our own sake and for the sake of the planet, we are being called to explore a "new way of being in the world." Let us pledge, this Lenten season, to begin.



Follow the Golden Rule

In 1993, the Parliament of the World's Religions identified the Golden Rule as the common basis for a global human ethic. By now, we have come to understand that in order to follow that rule, we need to expand its reach. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" no longer applies only to our families and local communities; in 2019, "others" must include people (and animals) in faraway places who will be affected by what we do—or fail to do—to meet the challenge of our warming planet. If Lent means anything, it means searching our consciences around the issue of global warming and the harm it will inflict on the "others" whom we are called by Christ to treat with the same compassion that we wish for ourselves and for those close to us.

But what can we, as individuals, do? Individually, we can't repair the ice floes in the Arctic to save the polar bears, or barricade the seas from flooding Sri Lanka, or irrigate the drought-ridden plains of the Sudan. But we can throw our support to organizations that are dedicated to just such efforts, organizations such as 350.org, the Environmental Defense Fund, Natural Resources Defense Council, Food and Water Watch, and the Sierra Club. We can search the Internet for organizations devoted to climate solutions, and read their websites carefully to make sure they are non-profit, do not accept donations from fossil fuel companies, and do not suggest that climate change is a hoax. We can join faith organizations committed to planet health, organizations such as Green Faith, Franciscan Action Network, and Operation Noah; we can write letters and call our political representatives. Most important, this Lenten Season, we can open the doors of "communitas" and expand our circle of concern from "people like us" to all sentient beings.

Take a Sabbath Walk in the Woods

This can be an occasion for the whole family to enjoy the great outdoors. You might want to take along a thermos of soup and some snacks, and maybe a tree guide to help you tell the beeches apart from the sycamores and oaks. It will add to the thrill of your experience if you have read Peter Wohlleben's *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate*. Wohlleben, a lifelong professional forester, will make you aware of the hidden 'conversations' taking place among the trees, how they are sending messages through the air by producing special scents and through their root systems by employing filaments of fungi. Knowing that trees have their own social lives and commitments can make walking among them a spiritual experience.

If you hike alone, consider taking along a copy of the Psalms and put post-it flags next to Psalms 19, 24, and 148. "Praise the Lord . . . fruit trees and all cedars," says the Psalmist (Ps. 148: 9) And in Psalm 19: "There is no speech nor are there words . . . yet their voice goes out through all the earth." (Ps 19:3-4) There are no human words, but there is a kind of communion that you can feel in the creaking of the branches, the wind rustling through the leaves, and the hushed stillness that seems always to envelop a solitary walker in the woods.

Write a Letter to your Actual or Imagined Grandchildren

This will not be an easy letter to write, for if we are honest, we will need to be asking their forgiveness. We will need to confess that, although we did not intentionally profit from the exploitation of the planet, still we managed to delude ourselves for too long about how much the system that was making our lives comfortable was costing the planet and the poor. Unbearably painful as it is, we may need to confess to our grandchildren that, in the words of

Robin Morris Collin, “we deprived you of the glories of polar bears, and whales, and elephants, who were far older and perhaps wiser than we were. They were a sight to lift the spirit!”

Are we doomed to have to write such a letter? Are we doomed to pass on a depleted planet to the children of the future? That remains to be seen, in part, based on what we do today, in 2019, to help restore our common home. As Collin insists, “the work of redemption begins with us.” The Lenten spirit calls us to redemption. Let the letter we write to the future record that, during this Lenten season, we began that work in earnest. If you want some invaluable guidance, consult *The Parents’ Guide to Climate Revolution: 100 Ways to Build a Fossil-Free Future, Raise Empowered Kids, and Still Get a Good Night’s Sleep*. As its author Mary DeMocker promises, “This isn’t another light bulb list or pile of parental ‘to do’s’ that merely add to your guilt; it’s an efficient, user-friendly directory of practical and imaginative ideas.”

Get Informed About the Climate Crisis

For starters, this means becoming at least aware of the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/technical-summary/>. This United Nations report is the product of thousands of scientists across the globe who volunteered their time to investigate the impact of global warming of 1.5 Centigrade above pre-industrial levels, a temperature which it predicts (with strong certainty) will be reached sometime between 2030 and 2052. This report is not easy to read, either intellectually or emotionally. Intellectually, it is difficult because, although the website is beautifully laid out and user-friendly, the data is dense and, for scientifically challenged folks (like myself), a real brain challenge. Luckily, the report supplies a Summary for Policy Makers that lays out the argument in more easily understood prose. If even that is too challenging, try reading one of the many newspaper and periodical summaries of the report, easily accessible online. Please be careful to read summaries that acknowledge the accuracy of IPCC report made possible by 97% of climate scientists and that do not claim to be the findings of unspecified “other scientists.”

Summaries will explain why the report is not just intellectually, but also emotionally difficult to hear. For the evidence makes clear that even if we manage to meet the target rise of no more than 1.5 C (the equivalent of 2.7 F), we will, in this century, experience massive climate events such as drought, desertification, flooding, species die-off, and the catastrophic displacement of up to 100 million human beings.

The report also suggests that capping the rise to below 1.5C can be achieved and is possible, but “only through rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure.” We have the technology, the report confirms. The question is whether we have the political will to make these changes. And this is where we, as individual citizens and Christians, have a definite role to play. If we believe that the Creator values Creation, and that human beings have been given the special responsibility to act on its behalf, then we must do what we can to put pressure on politicians, many of whom, unfortunately, are compensated by fossil fuel companies that wish to prevent these changes in order to protect their profits. Let us remember the Biblical mandate: “The Earth is the Lord’s and the Fullness thereof.” It does not belong to special interests.

Venture Out After Dark

In his seminal essay, *Nature*, called by some “our primal book,” Ralph Waldo Emerson lamented that, while past generations “beheld God and nature face to face,” we moderns seem to have settled for staying indoors and having that numinous nature experience only second hand. Emerson recommends venturing out to look at the stars. “If the stars should appear one

night in a thousand years," he says, how much we "would believe and adore; and preserve for many generations the remembrance of the city of God which had been shown!" Why not, during Lent, follow Emerson's advice? Venture out to view the wild beauty of the starry skies and let ourselves be overwhelmed by the magnificent cosmos of which we Earthlings are a part?

Of course, if you live in a city or a densely populated suburb, this starry display will probably not be available. You may be lucky enough to see Venus, the Evening Star, and occasionally Mars or Saturn. But venture out after dark, nevertheless. Sit on your front stoop or in your back patio and look up into the darkness. Feel the pulse of the city slowing down and the silence overtaking the streets. Watch the streetlights turn on, creating their soft glow. Savor the silence. There is beauty in this experience, and while it doesn't dazzle, one wouldn't hesitate to call it hallowed.



Study and Share Pope Francis's Encyclical, *Laudato Si'* ("Praise Be to You")

Catholic or not, you are bound to be moved by Pope Francis's eloquent Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*. In keeping with the "two books" tradition, Pope Francis calls nature a "constant source of wonder and awe" and also "a continuing revelation of the divine." His encyclical is a poem of praise, but it is also a powerful prophetic document, calling people (indeed, "every person on the planet") to a "global ecological conversion." Pope Francis emphatically connects the peril of our planet to issues of peace and justice, calling for "profound changes" in our current social and economic structures, which serve the interests of the rich and powerful at the expense of the poor and the planet. In fact, he does not shy away from calling these structures "sinful." *Laudato Si'* is a text that deserves to be reflected on and discussed together with others wanting to deepen their awareness of what this moment in planetary history is calling Christians to do. Especially fruitful are the discussion questions at the end of the volume, organized by the chapter topics including "The Gospel of Creation," "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," "Integral Ecology," "Lines of Approach and Action," and "Ecological Education and Spirituality." You can download the whole text

from the Internet where you'll also find a good many interpretive articles, and even several PowerPoint presentations!

Contemplate “Earth Rise”

In 1968, astronaut William Anders spent his Christmas holiday circling the moon. On his fourth go-round, he took a photograph that is credited with helping to inspire the environmental movement, launched officially two years later, on Earth Day, 1970. Apollo 8 entered the lunar orbit on Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, giving the astronauts this breathtaking view of Earth, blue-bright and beautiful, rising out of the vast lonely darkness of surrounding space. Filled with awe, they read aloud the Creation story from the book of Genesis. Subsequently, this photo has awakened thousands to the unique magnificence of our common home. On the 50th anniversary of the photo, Anders himself said, “We set out to explore the moon and instead discovered the Earth.”



Listen to our Young People

In 1992, at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, a 12 year-old girl from Canada named Severn Suzuki addressed the plenary session of the Rio summit. Her speech is worth listening to in total. It is eloquent, impassioned, and wise beyond her years. You can hear it at <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/severnsuzukiunearthsummit.htm>. Today, young people continue to be committed activists who are passionate about saving the planet and whose efforts often put ours to shame. One example is the Sunrise Movement. You can read about them at <https://www.sunrisemovement.org/>.

Have a Conversation with an Elder

You can Google Internet sites that will tell you how much hotter the temperature in your hometown is today than it was fifty years ago. But better yet, why not find an amiable elder who can give you stories as well as data. My eighty-year-old companion remembers how, when she was a teenager growing up in northern Pennsylvania, the canal that ran through the town was frozen solid four months of the year, and her friends would gather at the canal on weekends, build bonfires on the banks, make hot chocolate in big kettles, and skate together all afternoon into the early evening. Ask your companion what sorts of things he or she did outdoors when young. How cold was it in winter? How long did winter last? Did young people skate, sled, build snowmen? How hot was it in summer? Did they ride bikes, pick cherries, swim, fish, play ball in the street or in the park? Whoever your companion and wherever they grew up, their stories will be different from your own and well worth knowing.

Walk or Take a Bus

According to the 2017 National Household Travel Survey, almost 50% of all car trips were for destinations only three miles away or even less; more than 20% were for a mile or less. Think of the CO₂ emissions we could avert if we all chose cover those distances on foot or by bike. Not to mention the calories we'd save and how much better we would feel at the end of the day! For longer trips, taking the bus rather than the car has the added benefit of putting us in touch with fellow travelers –and it is less isolating than the automobile. A Lenten effort that might become a wholesome habit!

Fall in Love with an Other-Than-Human Species

Many of us are already in love with our dogs and cats, gerbils and canaries, but it's particularly important at this moment that we extend that love to species threatened by habitat loss and global warming. However, we can't "fall in love" with creatures we barely know. So a first step toward becoming an activist on behalf of imperiled fellow creatures is to get acquainted, which in this case means reading their biographies. Here are a few recommendations. To learn about dolphins' capacity for joy or elephants' long memories and deep family bonds, try *When Elephants Weep*, by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson and Susan McCarthy; to discover the surprisingly subtle "soul of an octopus," try the book of that name by Sy Montgomery; to be astounded by the shared musical culture and profound altruism of whales, read *The Whale* by Philip Hoare.

When you discover that these wild creatures have their own rich consciousness and culture, chances are that you will be moved to do whatever you can to preserve their well-being.

Patronize Farmers' Markets

Today, the fastest growing segment of the grocery industry is farmers' markets. The number of markets has increased from 2,000 in 1994 to more than 8,600 today. It is easy to see why farmers' markets are a healthy alternative to conventional grocery stores. For one thing half of participating farmers live within 10 miles of their outdoor market, meaning the food is fresher when it arrives. Environmentally, the shorter distance means fewer greenhouse gas emissions, since on average food at grocery chains travels about 1000 miles to get from field to the grocery shelves, a huge expenditure of fossil fuel energy.

Yet another reason to shop at farmers' markets, according to environmentalist Bill McKibben, is that they facilitate community. McKibben claims "the average shopper has ten

times as many conversations per visit there than at the supermarket . . . and ten times as many conversations means ten times as many possibilities –for love, for action, for friendship, for ideas, for meaning, for connection.” That’s food for the soul, as well as the body.



Photo by Jeanne Scheper

Give Up Doing Two Things at Once

“Simplify, simplify, simplify,” said Henry David Thoreau. It is cheery advice, but in this culture it can be difficult to follow. Too often our professional and social lives are driven by the opposite imperative: multiply, multiply, multiply. Do more and do it faster. We juggle doing two-things-at-once because otherwise we can’t get to the finish line by the end of the workday, and focusing on merely one thing at a time seems like a recipe for failure. Although studies have shown the opposite—that multitasking muddles thinking, creates confusion, and blocks creativity—in our fast-paced competitive culture, it can still be hard to believe that we’re not better off scanning the Internet while we’re also talking on the phone. This is the logic that keeps us over-scheduled, double-booked, harried and always in a hurry.

But what has this to do with Lent, one might ask, or with green spirituality? A great deal, says professor and pastor Walter Brueggemann, who calls Lent a “summons” from a Divine Intelligence “who wants us out of the rat-race” of “faster is better . . . and doing two

things at once.” Because the habit of doing two-things-at-once leaves us both overloaded and emotionally empty, we often fill that emptiness by over-consuming. So there can be a fairly direct connection between our hectic busyness and the mountains of garbage packed into our landfills and dumped into our oceans. “The soul grows by subtraction, not addition,” says Thoreau, and when it comes to consumerism, so does the health of the planet.

Become a Lenten Vegetarian

According to a report from the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, together the biggest twenty meat and dairy conglomerates produce more greenhouse gases annually than Germany, Canada, Australia, the UK, or France, and the top five meat and dairy companies produce more greenhouse gases than either ExxonMobil, Shell, or BP. See <https://www.iatp.org/emissions-impossible>. Clearly, these industries need to be effectively regulated if we are to meet the reduction in greenhouse gases necessary to avert a global warming catastrophe. But we can do our part by reducing our consumption of meat and dairy. If giving up meat has been a struggle, perhaps making it a Lenten resolution will boost your willpower. Lent is traditionally the season for fasting; what better devotional discipline than to become, for at least forty days, a vegetarian?

Start a Nature Journal

Surprisingly, one of the best things we can do for the natural world is to spend more time in it. This advice might not apply for farmers or landscape workers, but it is especially important for people who spend most of their waking hours indoors and for whom the out-of-doors is merely a corridor attaching their home to their office space. For many modern people, “nature” has become somewhat of an abstract concept—a place to visit on holidays, but otherwise not much of a presence. Unfortunately, in regard to environmental health, this is a problem, for we won’t be moved to fight for a world that we hardly know.

One remedy for our alienation from the natural world is to keep a nature journal, for doing so requires that we spend time outdoors on a fairly regular basis (the word *journal* means “daily”). And when we are out there, keeping a journal means we need to pay attention. What is going on? What are we seeing? Smelling? Hearing? The rich, myriad details of the natural world, often passing under our radar, rise to our attention when we need to record them. The marvel is that waking up to the world around us helps us to “wake up” to our own sense of being alive, as Henry David Thoreau, our most famous nature journalist, discovered early on in his sojourn at Walden. Although we pass through our lives “sound asleep nearly half our time,” says Thoreau, we can be revived by engaging with the “inexhaustible vigor” of the natural world.

Luckily, this year Lent occurs in the season when the world itself is waking up after its long winter’s sleep. In March and April there is a lot to listen to and look at: the return of robins and mourning doves, the first glimpse of butterflies and bumblebees. To keep a journal you need not be a naturalist who knows the names of all that you’re seeing. Just look closely. Describe in words or drawings exactly what you see. At first you can simply note that there are little purple, knobby flowers popping up through the ground; later you can look them up and discover—aha! They’re crocuses!

Investigate Clean Energy

While it’s true that information alone will not convince us to make the hard choices necessary to protect the planet, it’s also true that we can’t make those choices intelligently

without knowing what they involve. We need to know what are the pros and cons of converting to clean energy: What are the economic consequences? Will clean energy promote jobs? How quickly might a clean energy policy be put into action? If Lent is a call to discover “a new way of being in the world,” as theologian Walter Brueggemann suggests, then we need to give some serious thought to what a clean energy future might look like.

We need to do the research, and in so doing, we may discover things that will surprise us. Such as the fact that, when it comes to generating electricity in the U.S., there are already more people working in solar power than in coal, gas, and oil combined. In fact, almost twice as many, according to a 2017 Department of Energy Report. As for wind, there are over 54,000 wind turbines operating in the US producing 90,550 megawatts of electricity, enough to power over 24 million homes. (To put that figure in perspective, the state of Maryland has 2 million households; Texas has 8 million.)

It has been projected that the wind energy potential of just three states –Kansas, North Dakota, and Texas—would be sufficient to meet the electricity needs for the whole country. Another pleasant surprise is the news that wind power can be a godsend to small farmers who are struggling to keep their farms, for they can be paid up to \$5,000 a year for every turbine they allow to share their fields with crops and livestock, which apparently are not harmed by their windy presence. If you research online, cast a wide net so that you get a variety of perspectives, though of course be wary of sites that are sponsored by fossil fuels. If you want a good book, consider *Eaarth*, by Bill McKibben; *Climate Change: What Everyone Needs to Know*, by Joseph Romm; *An Inconvenient Sequel*, by Al Gore; *Drawdown*, ed. by Paul Hawken.



Find Your (prophetic) Voice

In the Biblical tradition, “voice” is the medium-of-choice for communication from the Divine. And when human beings respond to the Divine, they are called upon to ‘speak out’ on behalf of whatever the Spirit is requiring of them. Out of this dialogical tradition has come a distinctive genre of inspired protest literature, the books of the Prophets, who were fiercely vocal responders to God’s call. We are not called upon to be as fiercely eloquent as the Biblical prophets, but we are, in fact, called by faith to “speak up” on behalf of climate health and not to passively accept political and corporate actions that are ruinous to the environment.

Being politically vocal may feel uncomfortable at first (most worthwhile challenges do). But don’t let that discomfort discourage you; remember the adage “practice makes perfect.” Here is one way to start. Identify the environmental issue that most concerns you and identify the representative (local, state or federal) who is in the best position to weigh in on the issue. If you don’t know who your representative is, consult “Find Your Representative” at <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

To contact your Senator, try:

https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Directories_vrd.htm.

Next, call your representative's office and ask for an appointment. If you are part of an environmental group working on the issue, you'll have company, which is an asset, since your representative will be more responsive the more constituents involved. Prepare for the meeting by researching the issue; write a brief "position paper" signed by members of your group. You will probably end up meeting with the representative's staff person, which is all to the good, since staffers help write the representative's own position papers and agendas.

You can also write a letter to your local newspaper. Here the most effective letters are those that involve local environmental issues. You need not be Shakespeare; just state your case clearly, in language that strongly communicates your concern –and stay within 200 words.

Watch as the World Turns

At dusk and dawn, when the earth turns away from and then back to the sun, we can experience a rare, almost otherworldly realization that the world we live in is indeed a traveller in space, circling on its axis and around a star. At dawn, as the sun climbs over the horizon and bathes the Eastern sky with its first streaks of light, we are reminded that we are part of a larger solar world. And at dusk, at the blue hour, there is that "a certain slant of light" that Emily Dickinson celebrates:

Heavenly Hurt it gives us
We can find no scar
But internal difference
Where the meanings are.

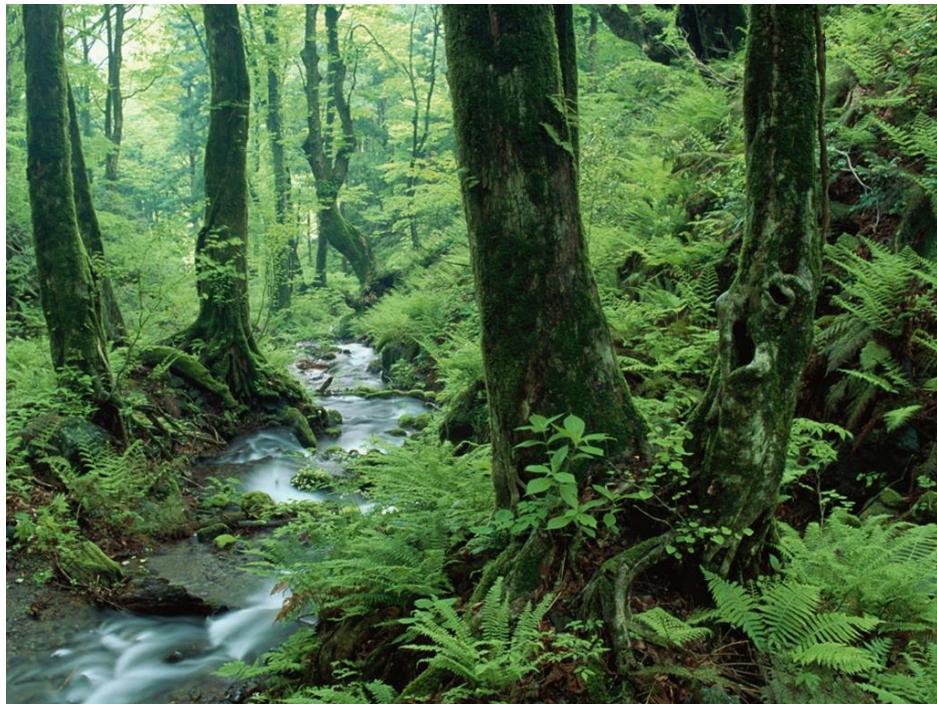
These moments at dusk and dawn can convey something hard to put into words, but deeply affecting. If we have 9 to 5 o'clock jobs, it can be hard to be outdoors and attentive to the skies at the opening and closing of the day, but perhaps during Lent we can make a special effort, at least on weekends, to be present to these brief opportunities for communion with the cosmos.

Express Your Gratitude to our State and National Forests

You might begin by offering a prayer of thanks, and then move on to making a contribution to your state forest for its role in purifying our air and water (see below). What exactly do forests do? Here, thanks to the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission, are some specifics:

Forests and Water

- More than half of U.S. drinking water originates in forests.
- One large tree can capture and filter up to 36,500 gallons of water per year.
- On average a mature tree can absorb 36 percent of the rainfall it comes in contact with.
- Forests capture rain in the canopy and on the forest floor, reducing stormwater runoff and flooding.
- Healthy forested watersheds provide high-quality habitat for sensitive aquatic species.
- Forests help improve water quality by extracting pollutants through tree roots.
- The value of water derived from national forests is estimated to be several billion dollars annually.



Forests Air & Climate

- One mature tree absorbs carbon dioxide at a rate of 48 pounds per year.
- In one year, an acre of forest can absorb twice the CO₂ produced by the average car's annual mileage.
- Deforestation accounts for up to 15 percent of global emissions of heat-trapping gases.
- Two mature trees provide enough oxygen for one person to breathe over the course of a year.
- Forests are the largest forms of carbon storage, or sinks, in the U.S.
- In one day, one large tree can absorb up to 100 gallons of water and release it into the air, cooling the surrounding area.
- Forests improve public health by keeping pollutants out of our lungs by trapping and removing dust, ash, pollen, and smoke.



Forests & Wildlife

- More than 5 million terrestrial species depend on forests for their survival.
- A square kilometer of forest can house more than 1,000 species.

- Rivers and watersheds in our national forests provide habitat for more than 550 rare, threatened and endangered aquatic species.
- The Lower Rio Grande Valley contains 1,200 plant, 300 butterfly, and hundreds of different animal species.
- Female black bears living in the mountains can roam across 2,800 acres.
- The red-cockaded woodpecker requires up to 50 acres to live.
- 68 species of birds rely on longleaf pine forests alone.

Note: To make a contribution to your state forest or to participate in a planting project, google your state forest or your state government natural resources center.

Do an Honest Moral Inventory

Lent is traditionally a time for self-denial and soul searching, so it is the proper time to ask ourselves: What are we willing to give up for the sake of the planet? What can we let go of? Can we let go of our sense of magical thinking, our hope that even if we pay no attention to the problems of the planet, they will go away? Can we, as Americans, let go of our sense of grandiosity and entitlement, our dedication to “bigger is better,” our belief in our global Manifest Destiny? As consumers, can we let go of our complacency? Our trivial pursuits? Curating our Facebook page on a daily basis? Eating watermelon in December? Ordering stuff we don’t need from the shiny catalogs that arrive every week in our mailbox? Can we let go of our addiction to novelty? To the adrenalin rush of our speedy lives? Lent is a time to be asking what our lives, freed of these distortions, might have to offer to ourselves, our communities, and the world.

Organize a Serve-the-Planet Committee in your Church

Your committee might decide to start small, by cleaning up the trash littering your neighborhood. Or you might decide to draft a Green Liturgy for Earth Day. You might talk to your church finance committee about divesting from fossil fuels. You might, as a parish group, join a local environmental action organization. You might start a weekly discussion forum for Pope Francis’s encyclical, *Laudato Si’*. You might want to start a communal garden and give the produce away to people in your community who are in need. You might want to read and discuss the ideas of contemporary eco-theologians (see entry below). You might want to sponsor a monthly movie night, showing films that focus on the environment. (Suggestions include *Merchants of Doubt*, *An Inconvenient Sequel*, *Before the Flood*, *The 11th Hour*.)

Whatever you choose to do, your committee members and your greater church community will be richer for it.

Volunteer at a Park or Nature Center

Almost every town has a park or nature center, and volunteering (especially at this time of year) can be a boon to the center as well as an opportunity to get down in the dirt. Your tasks will include mulching, weeding, and planting, and you’ll learn a lot about how to choose native plants and wildflowers, how to control invasive species, and the role of gardens in capturing rainwater runoff. You’ll work hard, get dirt under your fingernails, smell the freshly turned soil, and get your first peek at the emerging crocuses –great exercise for both the body and the spirit!

Listen to the Cantors of the Universe

British naturalist Gilbert White, writing back in the 18th century, comments on the discoveries of a musical friend “who has tried all the owls that are his near neighbours with a pitch-pipe set at a concert pitch, and finds they all hoot in B flat.” Our world is filled with the songs of creatures, all singing in their various keys and rhythms, but all declaring in their unique voices (to quote Gerard Manley Hopkins): “What I do is me, for that I came.” The hooting of great horned owls, the whoo-hooing of mourning doves, the honking of geese, the mooing of cows, the croaking of frogs, the bellowing of moose, the barking of seals, the groaning of walruses and the mellow crooning of the humpback whale. There is a symphony being staged every day by our fellow creatures, but except for the songsters in our own neighborhoods, we seldom get to tune in. During Lent you can get at least a teasing sample of their music by going to the online SeaWorld Animal Sound Library or to the following sites.

<http://soundbible.com/tags-animal.html>

<http://www.environment.gov.au/marine/marine-species/cetaceans/whale-dolphins-sound>

Plant a Tree

You might think that a single tree has very little effect on its surrounding environment, but happily you are mistaken, as this poster, tied to a tree in a Montgomery County Park, makes clear. You can enrich your own backyard environment by planting a tree (consult your local nursery for recommended native species) or participate in a planting project sponsored by your state's Department of Natural Resources –traditionally on Arbor Day. Other helpful reforestation projects are found at One Tree Planted and Plant it 2020.



Photo by John Mobley

Pray for Climate Justice

Climate activism is exhausting. We can often feel depleted and discouraged: the challenge is so daunting and our efforts seem so inadequate. When we are feeling overwhelmed and desperate, we need to pray. It can help to take our prayers outside, into the woods, or the backyard, or a local park, or into the garden—wherever we can find solitude among trees and grass and under the sky. Here we can listen to the birds and the wind in the trees. Or listen to the silence. Listen, above all, to the “still small voice” of the Spirit. According to Thomas Merton, the very best prayer is a listening prayer, and praying out-of-doors, in solitude, is in keeping with very ancient traditions. Christ also chose to pray out-of-doors, and in his most agonizing moments, he too went into the Garden.

Start an Activist Rolodex

A good many failures are famously “paved with good intentions.” An activist’s good intentions can be often stalled, sometimes disastrously delayed, simply by the absence, when needed, of a Senator’s email address or a council member’s phone number. It helps enormously to have a ready-made list of your representatives at all levels: federal, state, and local. If you don’t know who your congressional representatives are, consult “Find Your Representative”: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative> or Senator: https://www.senate.gov/reference/reference_index_subjects/Directories_vrd.htm Similarly, google your city council and keep a list of their members’ numbers nearby so that when you need to make contact, you can do so without wasting time and energy. The easiest and most efficient way to make your voice heard is to sign up for “5 Calls,” an activist app that keeps you abreast of issues, figures out who is the key figure with influence on the issue, and provides you with the phone numbers. Advocacy could not be more accessible!

Treat Yourself to American Nature Writing

One way of bringing the natural world more closely into your mind and heart is to read American nature writing, one of the glories of our nation’s literature and arguably our one indigenous literary genre. Ever since Henry David Thoreau asked the questions “Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?” American nature writers have been exploring the irreducibly real relationship between the human “self” and the natural world. For sure, in reading in these writers you will learn factual information about animals and trees, wildflowers and birds, the seasons and various weathers, but you will also discover how an intimate exploration of the natural world can give rise to meaningful spiritual insights, how “a fact flowers into truth,” in Thoreau’s words.

To take one example: in *The Star Thrower*, scientist Loren Eiseley describes watching a spider weaving her web in freezing winter weather around the one source of nearby warmth, a suburban street light. So struck is Eiseley by this that he fetches a ladder and crawls up for a closer look. After many moments of observation, he concludes:

The mind, it came to me as I slowly descended the ladder, is a very remarkable thing; it has gotten itself a kind of courage by looking at a spider in a street lamp.

Here was something that ought to be passed on to those who will fight our final freezing battle with the void. I thought of setting it down carefully as a message to the future: *in the days of frost seek a minor sun.*

"In the days of frost seek a minor sun." That is meaningful advice regardless of the weather. If you are hungry for this sort of provocative insight, you can satisfy that hunger by reading any number of our outstanding American nature writers. Suggestions include: Loren Eiseley, *The Star Thrower*; Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* and *Teaching a Stone to Talk*; Ed Abbey, *Desert Solitaire*; Gretel Ehrlich, *The Solace of Open Spaces*; Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams* and *Crossing Open Ground*—and of course, nature writing's patron saint, Thoreau, in *Walden*.

Be Environmentally Mindful at the Grocery Store

You might think that this is an appeal to carry your own shopping bags to the grocery store and refrain from buying bottled water, but we already know we should do both those things. Instead, this is an urgent plea for you to buy less food. Not less than you actually need, but less than you think you need, for studies show that Americans typically purchase more food than they actually consume. We typically overestimate what we need for the meals we plan to cook, and we also throw out food long before it has actually gone bad. We take the 'use by' labels far more literally than we need, for these are not regulated designations of food safety but merely indications of when the food should "taste best." According to *Drawdown*, a scrupulously researched report on global warming, food waste produces roughly 8% of all human-produced greenhouse gas emissions. This is a staggering percentage. Not all this waste is happening in our kitchens, of course. Much of it happens en route to our kitchens—in production, packaging, and transporting—but it's in our grocery carts and kitchens where we can make a difference. Let us remember Pope Francis's admonition that "purchasing is always a moral—and not simply economic—act."

Discover the Wisdom of Eco-Theologians

The Judeo-Christian tradition has been blamed for contributing to the degradation of the environment because, say these critics, the Biblical writings deconsecrated nature, placed human beings not "within" but "over" the rest of creation, treated the natural world as merely a stage setting for the human drama, and gave us a God who is Lord of Time rather than Place. There is some truth in these criticisms, and a contemporary branch of theologians have made it their mission to revisit biblical themes and images with the aim of offering fresh interpretations more relevant to our current ecological situation. These eco-theologians bring us compelling visions of the God "in whom we live and move and have our being" whose Spirit is present in the natural world and not only in the history books.

One of the earliest and most popular of these interpreters is Matthew Fox. His groundbreaking *Original Blessing* recommends a creation-centered form of spirituality free from the narrow fall-redemption focus. Feminist theologian Sallie McFague suggests imagining the world as God's body (see below); Jay B. McDaniel offers a four-dimensional paradigm: *Earth, Sky, Gods & Mortals*. Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest of the Passionist Order, author of *Dream of the Earth*, and perhaps the most influential of eco-theologians, sums up the guiding purpose of eco-theology this way: "We need a spirituality that emerges out of a reality deeper than ourselves, even deeper than life, a spirituality that is as deep as the earth process itself, a spirituality born out of the solar system and even out of the heavens beyond the solar system."

If you have felt the need to experience both your faith and the natural world in a new and deeper way, reading the work of an eco-theologian is a good place to start.

Learn Your Local Landscape

The old adage “Think globally; Act locally” is especially true for green activists. And if you do not already know your local environment, the first step is to get familiar with the ‘lay of the land.’ What, where, and how many are your local streams and rivers, and what larger body of water do they flow into? Are there wetlands? What is the local soil composition? What trees are native to the area? Investigating your local landscape is a pleasurable task, and it will naturally inform you about what components need your help. Do you need to help clean trash from the wetlands? Help solve the problem of pollution in the waterways? Write to your local representatives to ban the use of bee-killing insecticides? As always, there is added power in working together with others, so it’s a good idea to join a local environmental group. This might be a local chapter of a national organization or a grassroots local organization. You can find either one by searching online for “environmental organizations” in your zip code. For information on the health of your waterways, consult <https://watersgeo.epa.gov/mywaterway/map.html>



Practice *Lectio Divina* with St. Francis and Mary Oliver

Lectio Divina is a spiritual practice, founded by Benedictines, that combines reading with contemplation of sacred texts. The point of the practice is not to intellectually analyze the reading, but to “take it to heart,” to commune with the living word. Although the preferred text originally was Scripture, today people practice *Lectio Divina* with other works that are spiritually inspiring. One such text ideal for a green Lenten practice is the Canticle of the Sun (also called the Canticle of the Creatures) written in the 13th century by Christianity’s patron saint of ecology, St. Francis of Assisi. The canticle is a hymn of praise to our creaturely Brothers and Sisters—Sun, Moon, Wind and Air, Water—and to Mother Earth. It is an acclamation that

really should be memorized and repeated regularly by all Christians, for the values it conveys are key to our undoing the damage that we have inflicted on the natural world. Francis assumes that the natural world exists for divine celebration –not human exploitation. The theme of the Canticle is kinship; we are created as “family” and are all part of God’s choir. If you do not own a copy of the Canticle, you can find one online; and you can also find a lovely visual/musical arrangement sponsored by the Sisters of St. Francis of the Holy Cross on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nwZMIOsUCL0>.

If you would like to contemplate a contemporary version of “canticles of creatures,” you might choose poems by Mary Oliver, America’s Pulitzer Prize winning nature poet who died just this past January at age 83. In her forty-some works of poetry, Oliver celebrates the lifestyles and the wild joy of creatures inhabiting woods and ponds near her home that she explored on a daily basis. In her poems, she also teaches us to honor the holiness of our lives in nature. An early poem, entitled simply “Morning Poem,” begins, “Every morning/the world/is created” and, stanzas later, the verse ends “each pond with its blazing lilies/is a prayer heard and answered/lavishly/every morning/whether or not/you have ever dared to be happy/whether or not/you have ever dared to pray.”

Oliver is a perfect companion for *Lectio Divina* because she regarded poems as much more than simply words on a page. For her, poetry was truly a living language—“fires for the cold, ropes let down to the lost, something as necessary as bread in the pockets of the hungry.”

You can find a sample selection of her poems at the Poetry Foundation.
[<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver>](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/mary-oliver)

Slow Down

Years ago at a Festival of Faith and Writing Conference, writer Lauren Winner was asked what one could do to express resistance to prevailing cultural values, and she shocked everyone by replying “Take a nap!” She was being provocative, of course, but not merely. What she was getting at is in keeping with Pope Francis’s critique in *Laudato Si’* of what he calls the “rapidification” of life in Western cultures. He believes the pace of our contemporary lives is causing disastrous “harm to the world and to the quality of life of much of humanity.” Indeed, sociologists have amassed volumes of evidence of the damaging psychic and physical effects of our competitive culture. In spite of our comfortable material circumstances, many of us live with stress hormone levels that are ruinous to our health –and to our lives. Furthermore, the lifestyles that this stress is fueling are wrecking the environment: we produce too much, consume too much, throw too much away. Unsurprisingly, our personal health and the health of the planet are deeply interconnected.

It’s easy to say “slow down,” but that advice can seem hollow when in fact our careers and our financial survival depend upon doing the opposite. But we need to remember that “slow down” doesn’t necessarily mean “drop out.” We can take small steps to quiet our lives. We can examine our personal calendars to decide what we can afford to let go of. Sometimes, in fact, just the intention to slow down reduces the stress in our heads. We can plant mental speed bumps to slow down the incoming traffic of due dates and deadlines. A closed door, a cup of tea, a pause to read a line of poetry or to simply stare out the window. To remember where we are. To remember why we’re here.

Years ago, philosopher Blaise Pascal suggested that, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” Claiming some quiet, alone time for ourselves each day will not solve “all humanity’s problems,” but it is a small step in the right direction. So yes indeed, if we need one, let’s take a nap!

Draft a Green Liturgy

Most churches make an effort to have a green liturgy for Earth Day, but there really is no reason to ‘green the liturgy’ only one day a year. Nowadays, intercessory prayers should always include prayers for the planet and for those suffering from the breakdown of the environment. Your liturgy will really be an invitation for you to think creatively, to scour the Scriptures for passages celebrating creation, to read nature poetry and delve into your song library for earthy ballads. (One suggestion is *Missa Gaia*, Paul Winter’s “Earth Mass,” a liturgical masterpiece structured along the lines of a regular mass, including Kyrie, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, along with hymns and readings. The mass is sung by human voices but also includes the calls of wolves, whales, and other animals. It is available both on Amazon and YouTube.)

The joy here is in finding ways to embed earth-centered themes into the ritual orders of the service. This can be a group activity as well; do involve young people, for they not only have unconventionally creative imaginations, but also have a serious stake in moving ecological concerns to the center of our ritual practices and consciousness.

Contemplate Cosmological Time

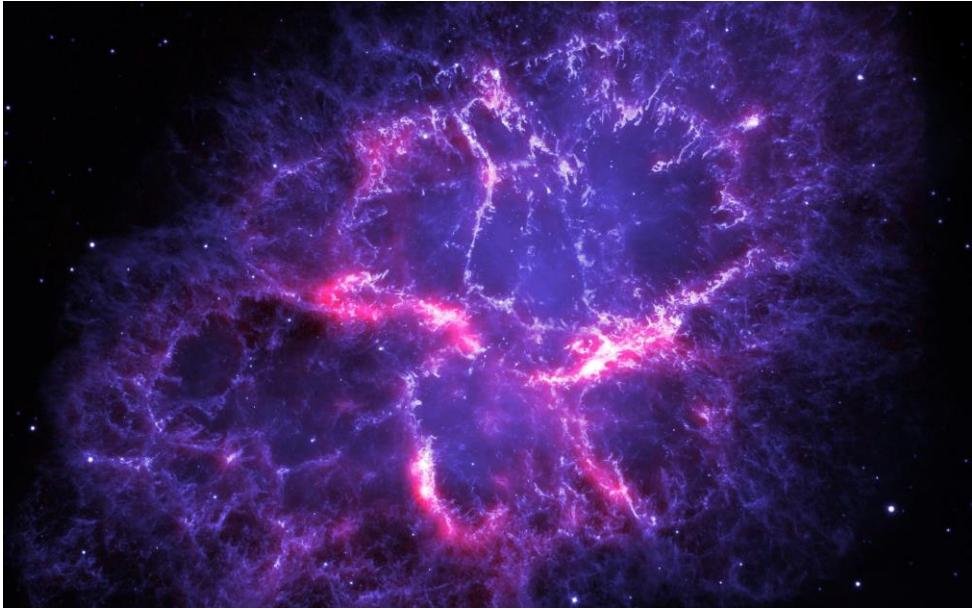
The world is unimaginably old. And in one unexpected way, so are we. The carbon, nitrogen, and oxygen atoms in our bodies were generated in star ‘ovens’ billions of years ago. “We’re made of star stuff,” says astronomer Carl Sagan, “the cosmos is also within us.” From the time of the “Big Bang” some 13.8 billion years ago, until now, the universe has unfolded with unbelievable patience. Galaxies and supernovas evolved slowly, taking their time over billions of years. Some nine billion years after the Big Bang, our sun was born and a half billion years later our Earth formed and slowly unfolded its atmosphere, oceans and continents. It took another half billion years for the first prokaryotic cell to emerge.

Contemplating the slow grandeur of cosmic time should be a thrilling and deeply humbling experience. But perhaps we are no longer as awed by the spectacle as we once were or should be. Today, the terms “millions” and “billions” can seem almost commonplace; so casually are they bruited about on financial pages, referring not to time, of course, but to the accumulation of money.

To restore our respect for cosmic patience, we might measure a “billion” in terms we can relate to. Let’s begin with the shortest unit—a second. One billion seconds is the equivalent of 31.7 years. One billion minutes returns us to the first century C.E. –the time of Christ. One billion hours equals 115,000 years and a billion days amounts to almost three million years. Can we even imagine how many days there would be in one billion years? We can’t; there are no words to do justice to 365,000,000,000 days.

The universe has taken its time with us. One hundred million years ago flowers appeared on earth; some 60 million years ago birds appeared in the air and mammals walked the land. Two million years ago, one of those mammals developed the first glimmers of human consciousness. We have had a long and awesome history.

Clearly, the natural world is not focused on the short term –but destruction of that world, unfortunately, might be. It took the earth millions of years to bury the decayed plants that form the fossil fuels we have managed to extract in only several decades. Geologically, the current age has been named “Anthropocene” to denote the fact that human beings are now the dominant force determining the future of the planet. Let us be equal to that honor.



Imagine the World as God's Body

Sallie McFague, a contemporary eco-theologian, has suggested that we imagine the world as God's body as a way of vividly internalizing the truth of God's incarnational presence in creation – a truth that has been obscured by traditional monarchical images of God as "King" or "Ruler of the Universe." McFague reminds us that imagery is not incidental to the way we experience the Divine. The image of God as "Absolute Monarch," for example, accentuates the distance between God and the natural world and places us in the role of passive subjects. On the other hand, if we think of the world as God's body, we are reminded of "God's palpable presence in all space and time." If our worship services included images of creation as the visible expression of "God's very being," how would this change our relationship to trees and mountains and wolves and whales? How might it strengthen our commitment to the health of the planet? Might it, as McFague suggests, dramatically drive home to us what is at stake in the climate crisis and help us to understand that injury to the created world is, in a real sense, injury to the "incarnate God."

Be Willing to Stand at the Foot of the Cross

Let us not fool ourselves. What is happening to the planet under our watch amounts to a crucifixion. Globally, the five hottest years in all of temperature history have been the past five years, from 2014 to now. The rate of ice melt in the Antarctic has sextupled since the 1970's, increasing from 40 billion tons a year to 250 billion tons a year. Scientists predict that ocean levels could rise three feet by the end of this century if we do not bring carbon emissions under control. We are losing species at a furious rate, dozens of species a day, over a thousand times the natural background rate of species extinction. If nothing is done, by mid-century, predictions are that we could lose as many as 30 to 50% of all living species. A die-off this calamitous is nothing less than a crucifixion. Creation is on the cross.

In Christian tradition, the cross is the symbol of the evil human beings are capable of—not just the more sensational types of evil, but what Episcopal priest and Jungian psychologist Morton Kelsey calls “the civilized vices.” Those would include greed, cowardice, bigotry, falsehood, arrogance and indifference —“vices we all share.” These were the vices that crucified Jesus, suggests Kelsey, and they are responsible for the crucifixion of creation today.

We know how, on the day of Christ’s crucifixion, most of his followers abandoned him, not out of malice, but out of fear and faintheartedness. The reality was too painful, too overwhelming. For the same reasons, many of us turn away from the painful, overwhelming truth of what is happening to the planet. But to the extent that we ignore these realities and refuse to act, we have entered into the crucifixion. Lent is a time for inner reckoning and repentance, for seeking forgiveness for the harm we have done, but it is also a time for acting to repair that harm. Let us have the courage not to turn away, but to respond to the global crisis in ways worthy of our faith.

Keep Hope Alive in the Dark

Having an ecological conscience can be painful. Everywhere you turn, it seems, you are confronted with scary evidence of the breakdown of environmental systems –new and more dangerous estimates of the melting icecaps in Antarctica, pictures of starving drought victims in the Sudan, photos of catastrophic forest fires. It can be hard not to feel overwhelmed and discouraged.

My chiropractor daughter likes to say, jokingly, “If you want to improve your posture, hang out with tall people.” By the same token, if you want to find emotional support during dark days, hang out with fellow activists. They will understand how you’re feeling and be good to you. And you’ll discover time and time again that the best tonic for despair is to join with others and do the work –make the phone calls, write the letters, visit city hall. After all, the reason hope is considered one of the cardinal virtues and not just a lucky gift, is because, like charity, it’s a practice and requires doing.

Sometimes in the darkest days, it can also help to take our despair into the woods. Old trees can feel like wise elders; being in their company can quiet our anxieties. We might also recall that in their darkest days, when they too had lost hope, the women who went to anoint Jesus’s body in the tomb heard words they could not, in their despair, have imagined possible: “Be not afraid” (Mark 16:6).

Carry Your Ecological Conscience Beyond Lent into Ordinary Time

Saving the world is not something that requires our attention only one season a year. Our commitment to the planet needs to extend beyond Lent into “ordinary time,” for, in fact, it is the whole concept of “ordinary time” that is imperiled by climate change and that needs our protection. When events that are expected to happen only once-in-a-thousand-years begin to happen regularly every year, then “ordinary time” has lost its meaning. There have been seven “once-in-a-thousand-year” flood events in the U.S. since May of 2010. Between March of 2015 and August of 2016 there were 18 major flood events in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, five of them in Houston alone. On April 18, 2016, Harris County, Texas received 240 billion gallons of rainfall –the equivalent of all the water from Niagara Falls pouring right

into Houston for 3.6 days. In 2015 alone, there were more than 1,000 natural catastrophes recorded around the world.

Catastrophic events such as these, happening with such frequency, are far from ordinary; they are the expression of nature “groaning in travail.” Until we join the struggle to combat climate change –until we commit to replacing fossil fuels with clean energy—the travail will intensify.

Nature’s “ordinary time” is always equivalent to “ecological time,” the stability of balanced relationships between organisms and orders of the natural world. Unless we stop disrupting that ecological balance, we cannot expect the natural world to return to ordinary time. The word “ecology” comes from the Greek word *oikos*, meaning “home,” and while the Lenten season is an ideal time for strengthening our commitment to our planet’s “home economics,” protecting the planet cannot be a merely seasonal endeavor. Let us, this Lenten season, pledge to devote our time and energies all year long to protecting the ordinary time of natural Creation.

Envision a New Way of Being in the World

As Sallie McFague reminds us, “The planet is not deteriorating because of what we do in our free time or weekends; its problems come from the center, not the periphery of our lives. By the same token it won’t be saved by the climate acts that we do after work and on weekends –as important as these undoubtedly are—but by what we do and how we think about who we are and what we’re about and why we’re here.” McFague joins the many other theologians and environmentalists who agree that the ecological crisis is a profound call—not for a new technological fix or a few minor changes at the margins of our lives—but for a whole new vision of what it means to be a human being on this planet Earth. So far, the habits and values of modern culture have subsidized environmental violence; unless we profoundly change, the planet cannot survive us.

What would such a fundamental change look like? That, of course, remains to be seen, but it would surely need to begin by converting our predatory attitude to the natural world to a reverence for the Earth as a *sanctum sanctorum*. We would need to embrace the ‘inconvenient truth’ that nature is not real estate; that the earth is not a filling station and forests are not primarily lumber-in-waiting. We would need to question the economic and social systems that have led us to the brink of catastrophe. We would have to reject the grotesque irony of having one half the world threatened by obesity while the other half is starving.

Author Brennan Manning reports that a century ago in the Deep South, the phrase used to describe the experience of being “born again” to a new way of life was this: “I was seized by the power of a great affection.” Perhaps the resistance to giving up our culture’s exploitative habits will give way when we are similarly seized by a “great affection.” Profound changes in our lifestyle will not be easy, but there will also be powerful existential rewards. Less “getting and spending,” and more time with family and community; less time competing for material gain, and more time for sharing and the satisfactions of creative endeavors; less time punching the time clock and more time “at play in the fields of the Lord.”

Prepare for Easter and for Earth Day

In 2019, we celebrate the holiest day of the Christian year only one day before Earth Day. On April 21st, the Suffering Servant of Good Friday becomes the Cosmic Christ of Easter Sunday. On that day, we celebrate resurrection and the promise of new life. On April 22nd, we celebrate the 49th Earth Day. On Easter we witness a miracle; on Earth Day we dedicate ourselves to a mission—to serve the spirit indwelling in creation. On behalf of the Earth, let us carry the energy and hope of Easter forward into Earth Day and practice resurrection. Amen and Hallelujah!

