

See how the flowers of the field grow
Part 2 - Stopping

Psalm 8: 3-9 (NIV)

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Linger over these words, read them over slowly and prayerfully.
Notice anything that catches your attention — a word or
phrase, a picture which forms in your mind, a connection to an
experience or memory.

Consider:

- If the natural world is a window into the mind of the creator,
what do we see?

- What do we learn about the artist by looking at the artist's
work?

The Summer Day

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean—
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver

The window of nature

Creation has ever been my place of resurrection! In it I have found inspiration, peace and sometimes healing. And deeper than that, I have glimpsed the image of the creator, imprinted upon the fabric like a watermark on a banknote...

To experience nature immediately is the most beneficial form of prayer and reflection on creation. Walk or sit somewhere in woods or fields or garden, just being aware of what you see, like a gold-pro prospector gazing at a pan of grit from the river, looking for specks of gold. Stop long with a leaf or a piece of bark, just appreciating texture and design and colour. Don't hurry. The voice of nature is often quiet and shy. Use, as far as possible, all of your senses, eyes for colour and design, touch for texture, ears for the sounds around you, smell for the cut grass or the woodbine, and even taste (with care!). Give God praise and thanks. Remember to be still. When you are with your lover you want to be alone. Being alone in a landscape is a way of communing with it, and entering into its mystery. Our relationship to it is reciprocal. Our courtesy towards the earth will enter the relationships in our lives. So I will find in others the dignity, the wisdom, the mystery that I find in the landscape.

What is to be gained by encouraging this sense of God present in the earth and all elements? For the spiritual person it is, of course, an expression of a reality which cannot be seen, but is nevertheless real. The person standing in the sunshine on a glorious summer day feels the need to praise the sun-blessed day as a jewel dropped from God's hand. What a wonderful, beautiful mind this day must have come from, he says, and asks that this loveliness pass into his spirit, and flow out from there in the right-doing of his life, and the love which gives itself...

Creation is, as we are aware from the Book of Genesis, the product, we might say, of the imagination of God. He created 'out of nothing, by his word' as the old catechism used to say. Some would depict God's creativity as playfulness. All creation, therefore, is dependent on God, has a participation in the energia of God. Everything participates in him.

From Fintan Creaven SJ, *Body and Soul*, SPCK 2003.

God's Grandeur

This poem, by the great 19th-century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, is an expression of the energy and variety in creation, even though it has been damaged by people and industry. Hopkins, who was a Jesuit priest, is a master of the sound and music of poetry; the richness of language comes tumbling out. Hopkins' father communicated to his son a sense of nature as a book written by God which leads its readers to a thoughtful contemplation of him, and this runs through much of Hopkins' poetry.

The line 'Why do men then now not reck his rod?' is Hopkins' expression of surprise and frustration at why human beings don't heed God's authority, even though it is writ large in nature. The poem seems perhaps even more relevant today when the earth is more 'seared, bleared, smeared' than it was in Hopkins' time. Yet this resplendent, energy-filled creation is never spent, always fresh.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

A PAGE TO PONDER

The fast pace of our lives makes it difficult for us to find
grace in the present moment.

Macrina Wiederkehr



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Where do I find moments of grace in the natural world,
and what do they say to me?