

# Online Resource - Lenten Reflections

# The Grace of Place

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

*"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." St Francis of Assisi*

## Introduction

During Lent, we are invited to read and reflect on the Sunday Gospels with our senses open to the grace of place. Having a heightened sense of place in the natural world enables us to grow in our reverence for God, and in our care for all creation.

This resource connects the Gospel of each Lenten Sunday in Year C with different aspects of place where God is *revealed*, where God *inspires* us and where God *challenges* us to be transformed, to embrace 'ecological conversion'.

## The six topics are:

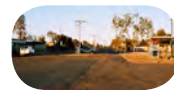
### Wild Places



### Urban Places



### Rural Places



### Sacred Places



### Coastal Places



### My Place



St Francis of Assisi prayed, "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us". We are earthlings. Jesus was an earthling. Hebrew Scripture tells the story that we were formed "from the earth" (adamah).

*"In Jesus of Nazareth, God has become an Earth creature, one of us, part of the interconnected web of life, so that all of Earth's creatures might be transformed in God"*

*Denis Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World*

The Earth is the place where we live, the first book of God's revelation. In the Genesis creation stories, God pronounces all creation very good, that is, full of grace.

Jesus was very much at home in his place in Galilee and the places he journeyed to. Those who visit where Jesus lived describe a feeling of a better understanding of not just the 'Jewishness' of the person Jesus, but also the significance of his words and the imagery he employed in his teaching.

Having a sense of place is an essential part of existence for the survival of all species, human and non-human as we share where we live. It is the reason for ears, eyes, noses and other sensate parts of bodies.

But as sensate human beings, we know an awareness of place is more than survival. We like to belong to a place. Places care for us. Place is in our memories, telling the stories of where we have come from and helping define who we are. Place informs our world view. It is part of our culture, where we celebrate our rituals.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* urges us to care for our common home because "this sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her." #2

In our mobile, noisy, technological urban age that is increasingly disconnected from the natural world, it is becoming more difficult for many of us to appreciate God's gift of place.

For Aboriginal peoples the place owns them. They do not own the place.

*"My people have been so aware of Nature. It is natural that we will feel close to the Creator."*

*Miriam Rose Ungunmurr, Dadirri.*

They know their country because they learn from the earliest age the proper behaviour through watching, listening and telling their stories. These stories connect them to their people, the water, the land, the sky, the animals and the plants. Their tracks through country follow the storylines that connect places. We are blessed in Australia to have the opportunity to learn from them.

By connecting to place we can learn deep listening and find God revealed there. We can meditate in wonder at the diversity of life. We can reflect in sadness that Earth, our common home is suffering. We can accept the challenges we face in helping care for our place.

*"For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."*

*Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #146*



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# Online Resource - Lenten Reflections

# The Grace of Wild Places

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

*"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." St Francis of Assisi*

## 1st Sunday of Lent

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the desert for forty days, to be tempted by the devil. Lk 4: 1-13

## God Revealing.....

For humans to go into wild places, we are generally more alert that we are in the territory of animals, plants and terrain that have not been "tamed". We are there on their terms. Attitudes to wilderness have changed over time. Old Testament references describe wilderness as barren, threatening, desert landscapes. In the eighteenth century, naturalist Henry Thoreau, promoted the concept that "in wildness is the preservation of the world".

*"The beauty of nature and the wilderness has become vitally important for the spirituality of many people." Paul Collins*

Now, scientists define a wilderness area as a large area of land that together with its native plant and animal communities is essentially unchanged by human activity.

In Australia many wild places are of spiritual and cultural importance for Aboriginal peoples. Australia's wild places are diverse, encompassing Forests, Wetlands, Deserts and Marine Areas. Australia is one of only seventeen countries recognised in the world for its high level of biodiversity much of which is unique. Wilderness areas maintain biodiversity by helping sustain symbiotic relationships.

Today's technological society causes habitat fragmentation and degradation, leading to extinction of species. Preserving larger areas of wild places supports better connected populations of species, reduces extinction risk and contributes to greater resilience.  
Source: 'Wilderness and Nature Conservation' (Mackey, et al). <http://trove.nla.gov.au/work/26124354?selectedversion=NBD41258576>

## God Inspiring.....

Jesus, inspired by God's spirit went into a wilderness area. He would have been aware of the ability of wild places to strip one of the usual supports of town dwellers: easy access to food, drink, shelter and human company. To be in solitude in a wild place enables one to be aware of God's presence in all the other life present there.

Jesus, open to the presence of God's grace, even though he was tempted by ideas of power and wealth, found clarity of thought about his mission in life. "As biblical scholar Francis Moloney points out, being with the wild beasts suggests that the prophetic promises of new creation are being fulfilled in Jesus." Denis Edwards, *Jesus and the Natural World*.

Prayer:

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. *Pope Francis*.

*"In Aboriginal cultures, the creator spirits walked this land and called each place into being. They gifted each newly created place with a name they sang. The power of that song sang these places to life."*

*Julian Tenison Woods, Symphony of Life.*



Image source: [goo.gl/](http://goo.gl/)

*"Let us journey to a lonely land I know...the wild is calling, calling.....Let us go."*

*Robert Service, The Call of the Wild*



Image: [goo.gl/5MxtEB](http://goo.gl/5MxtEB)

## God Challenging.....

When you enter a wilderness place remember that it was there before you and will be there after you move on. It is polite to ask permission to come and learn in that place.

Wilderness areas are under threat from development and mining. The Painted Desert in South Australia with its ancient weathered rock hills of magnificent colours, sits above the Great Artesian Basin. It is home to many rare species of plants and animals, such as Australia's largest monitor lizard, the Perentie, *Varanus giganteus*. [goo.gl/Be5iha](http://goo.gl/Be5iha) Despite this, an open cut coal mine is planned. <http://www.altonaenergy.com/>

Learn about a mining project that threatens wild places in your area. If possible go there. Discuss with others how you can get involved in the protection of that wilderness area. Share what you do with others. Make time to pray and reflect on what you are doing.



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# Online Resource - Lenten Reflections

# The Grace of Sacred Places

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

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## 2nd Sunday of Lent

He took Peter and John  
and James and went up the  
mountain to pray.  
Lk 9: 28b-36

*"When we visit sacred sites we go  
there with humility, perform our acts of  
respect and then see what happens—we  
surrender to the place rather  
than try to 'control' it."  
James Swan, Sacred Places.*



Image: [goo.gl/3uLd2M](http://goo.gl/3uLd2M)

## God Revealing.....

Sacred natural sites can be important places of reference for cultural identity: for an extended family, a clan, a tribe, a religious faith or entire nations that may root their identity in a specific place in nature. [goo.gl/ZwSooP](http://goo.gl/ZwSooP)

Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuta (Olgas) are probably the most prominent sacred natural places in Australia.

They are part of Dreaming Tracks or songlines which connect other sacred places. Uluru is the largest rock outcrop in Australia, part of a large underground rock formation which includes Kata Tjuta. Most geologists hold that this formation is the remains of a 600 million year old sedimentary bed which was raised and folded by earth movements, then eroded so that the large rocks are left.

The Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara care for their sacred place. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provides guidelines for the care and preservation of natural sacred places. [www.iucn.org](http://www.iucn.org)



Image: [goo.gl/nR33P5](http://goo.gl/nR33P5)

## God Inspiring.....

God's Spirit graces us in surprising ways, in people and places we least expect.

Reflect on the inspiration of these people:

- Theologian, Denis Edwards writes "We experience the Spirit as the nearness of God in the natural world. The Spirit is the unspeakable closeness of God in the experience of mountains, deserts, forests and seas, in the sense of being deeply connected with a place, and in the moments of real encounter with trees, flowers, birds, and animals".
- Bishop Kenneth Cragge wrote, "Before you approach another people, another culture, another religion you must first take off your shoes for the place you are approaching is holy".
- Pope Francis in Laudato Si' says, "The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places." #84

Prayer:  
God of light, lead us from the darkness of self-centredness into the light of God's infinite love in the complexity of life around us and learn to live with it happily.

*".....It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners.."  
Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #146.*

*Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #146.*

## God Challenging.....

Vicki Clark, Mutthi Mutthi woman writes, "We walk together on sacred ground. Black feet, white feet.... the Dreaming is ever present moving beneath our feet. The landscape is alive. Never deplete it to the point where it can never be replenished. Respect the land and engage in an ongoing relationship with it".

Go to your sacred place. Close your eyes to better feel the wind on your skin. Be aware of different smells. Look for trails of creatures. Keep a journal of your experiences.

A labyrinth is a prayer tool that enables you to walk along a spiral that represents the journey inward and then outward. Find a labyrinth near you and begin using it. The worldwide labyrinth locator has details: <https://labyrinthlocator.com/>



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# Online Resource - Lenten Reflections

# The Grace of Coastal Places

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

*"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." St Francis of Assisi*

## 3rd Sunday of Lent

Jesus said to them in reply,  
"Do you think that because these  
Galileans suffered in this way  
they were greater sinners  
than all other Galileans?"  
Lk 13: 1-9

## God Revealing.....

Australia has one of the longest coastlines of any country - thirty six thousand km (*Australian Bureau of Statistics*). More than a quarter of its population live within 50km of the coast. People love to spend leisure time on our famous beaches. Coastal ecosystems literally link the land and the sea. Many species move between complex and sensitive ecosystems – such as estuaries, freshwater wetlands, coastlines, and forested floodplains - to feed and breed throughout their life cycles.

Australia's diverse seagrasses represent half the number of species in the world. Our coral reefs, including the Great Barrier and Ningaloo Reefs are unique. Shore birds, including migratory birds, make up 10% of Australia's birdlife. The 2 million migratory shorebirds that fly to Australia each year are born in the arctic tundra of Russia and Alaska. [goo.gl/vwt6Fs](http://goo.gl/vwt6Fs)

Human uses of coastal areas tend to conflict with the conservation of flora and fauna. Population growth, agriculture, mining and technology have placed coastal ecosystems under great pressure. [goo.gl/FmGqF4](http://goo.gl/FmGqF4)

In 2004, the Bishops of Queensland wrote a pastoral letter about these concerns and the impact on the Great Barrier Reef, called "Let the Many Coastlands Be Glad". [goo.gl/Q5uhOX](http://goo.gl/Q5uhOX)

*"To a person uninstructed in natural history, his country or seaside stroll is a walk through a gallery filled with wonderful works of art, nine-tenths of which have their faces turned to the wall."*

– Thomas Huxley

*"I define sacred as living life by the  
grace of God "  
Lailah Gifty Akita*

## God Inspiring.....

Jesus spent much time in coastal places. It was along the shores of Galilee that he gathered his disciples, taught, ate, listened, told parables and accompanied fisherfolk. We can ponder whether Jesus and his disciples paused to play with the sand as they talked and walked along the constantly moving and changing coastline.

Reflect on the words of Rachel Carson:  
"Once this rocky coast beneath me was a plain of sands; then the sea rose and found a new shore line. And again in some shadowy future the surf will have ground these rocks to sand and will have returned the coast to its earlier state. And so in my mind's eye, these coastal forms merge and blend in a shifting kaleidoscopic pattern in which there is no finality, no ultimate and fixed reality – earth becoming fluid as the sea itself", Rachel Carson, "The Earth Speaks".

These places provide the context for Jesus' message in the Gospels.

Prayer:  
With your grace loving God, teach us more of your unfolding gift of life by wondering about coastal places.

*"When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves." Pope Francis LS #115*



Image: [goo.gl/W2Xp2B](http://goo.gl/W2Xp2B)



Image: [goo.gl/FWaaqT](http://goo.gl/FWaaqT)

## God Challenging.....

The critically endangered curlew sandpiper, is currently declining at the rate of 8% per year. When Jesus teaches that God feeds and clothes each bird of the air, and we learn this information, what is the challenge for us as followers of Jesus? Join the Birdlife Australia Shorebirds 2020 program. [goo.gl/pAgXYW](http://goo.gl/pAgXYW)

Discuss what impact humans and pet dogs have on beaches. Take into consideration the other species that inhabit and depend on the beach. Discuss the impact plastics have on coastal places. Learn practical actions from Take 3. [www.take3.org.au](http://www.take3.org.au)

Coastcare is a community of volunteers caring for their coast who identify local environmental problems and work together to achieve practical solutions. There are currently 2,000 Coastcare groups all around the country. Support Coastcare. <https://landcareaustralia.org.au/coastcare>



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# Online Resource - Lenten Reflections

# The Grace of Rural Places

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

*"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." St Francis of Assisi*

## 4th Sunday of Lent

**"When he had freely spent everything, a severe famine struck that country, and he found himself in dire need. So he hired himself out to one of the local citizens who sent him to his farm to tend the swine."**  
Lk 15: 1-3, 11-32

## God Revealing.....

Approximately 35% of Australia's population live in rural places. Rural areas feed our cities and generate income for the nation. The need for food security will grow as the world population grows. Australia's rural areas are already seen as places of agricultural importance by those from other countries who are concerned about feeding their peoples. [www.regional.org.au](http://www.regional.org.au)

Scientists say the impacts of rising carbon emissions on climate will exacerbate the already harsh climatic conditions, water supply and ancient depleted soils. [goo.gl/8uNiFz](http://goo.gl/8uNiFz)  
As the demand for water and food increases, there are competing views on the future of agriculture in Australia. Communities are afraid.

Some see the growing global demand for protein and grain as opportunities for investment in technological approaches to agriculture such as bio-technology and gene technology. Pope Francis says, "We cannot interfere in one area of the ecosystem without paying due attention to the consequences of such interference". Pope John Paul II in LS #131. [goo.gl/jQQTgH](http://goo.gl/jQQTgH)

Others see the damage that over-use of fertilisers, chemicals and large scale farming has had on soils, ecological systems and waterways. They are using agro-ecology, based on the science of ecology, to manage food production. [www.soilsforlife.org.au](http://www.soilsforlife.org.au)

***"The human being cannot live without a habitat that is integrally healthy, good and beautiful."***

**Archbishop Sorondo,**

**Pontifical Academy of Sciences**

## God Inspiring.....

Pope John Paul II said in Canberra in 1986, "Look dear people of Australia, and behold this vast continent of yours! It is your home! The place of your joys and pains, your endeavours and your hopes! And for all of you Australians, the way to the Father's house passes through this land – Jesus Christ is the way." Reflect on the interconnectedness of rural places and urban places in our land.

Place has often been divorced from our Christian spirituality which has been focussed on life hereafter. Fr Denis Edwards is leading the way in helping us realise that "The incarnation is about God embracing this created world, the world of matter and living creatures, and doing so eternally." Denis Edwards, "Jesus and the Natural World".

Reflect on being a creature who is dependent on all God's gifts in rural places. How can we regain a spirituality that is attuned to how the land speaks, questions, informs our actions?

Prayer: "We express our sorrow for the limits we have put on God's Spirit at work in us, by our unbelief and lack of understanding of God's presence in us, by acting as if we are disconnected from God, our neighbour, and our world, by our deliberate words and actions that have ruptured connectedness and by our lack of concern for social justice and environmental issues. Michael Morwood, "Praying a New Story".



Image source: [goo.gl/8e9dZw](http://goo.gl/8e9dZw)

***Each organism, as a creature of God, is good and admirable in itself; the same is true of the harmonious ensemble of organisms existing in a defined space and functioning as a system.***

**Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #140.**

## God Challenging.....

With the challenge of climate change, Pope Francis proposes a vision for a positive future of integral ecology that links environmental, economic and social ecology? He calls for an education in this process. Read Ch 4 of Laudato Si' (Care for our Common Home). Get involved in a Laudato Si' study and action group.

Read:  
Australia can't feed the world but it can help: [goo.gl/KdHzm](http://goo.gl/KdHzm)  
Agro-ecology: <http://ecoag.org.au>

Discuss these two approaches in the light of Laudato Si'. Get involved in groups that are protecting rural areas eg: Landcare, farmers against mining of agricultural land.

Compost your food scraps and add to the soil in the garden at your home or church.

Learn more about soil: [goo.gl/OC4aLZ](http://goo.gl/OC4aLZ)



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# The Grace of Urban Places

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## 5th Sunday of Lent

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Jn: 8: 1-11

## God Revealing.....

Australia, like the rest of the world, is increasingly urbanised. 89% of its population live in cities of over 100,000. [goo.gl/lj70go](http://goo.gl/lj70go)

Under the current scenario, Australia's population is projected to grow to 36 million by 2050. The growth rate of the largest cities is projected to accelerate eg Sydney is estimated to be 72% of the population of NSW by 2030 (The Suburbanisation of Coastal Australia, [goo.gl/0Uo10k](http://goo.gl/0Uo10k))

There are many reasons why people like to live in cities: access to employment, education, health facilities, shopping, cultural experiences. As roads and buildings increase, so does loss of diversity of flora and fauna as trees are cut down and land cleared. Some birds adapt such as magpies and ibis, while small birds are disappearing. Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* described many cities as huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water. #153

Urban places generate the heat island effect which can be seen from space. Average temperatures within Melbourne's CBD are up to 4°C higher than the surrounding suburbs. Over half of city surfaces are heat absorbing materials, such as darker coloured roofs, car parks, roadways and footpaths.

Cities are major contributors to global warming and therefore need to play a major role in efforts to reduce greenhouse gases.

State of the Environment Report 2016. [www.environment.gov.au/science/soe](http://www.environment.gov.au/science/soe)  
Cities as COP21 Climate Solution. [goo.gl/rbaqkH](http://goo.gl/rbaqkH)

## God Inspiring.....

Jesus attended the temple in the city as a faithful Jew. The parables he told his followers often featured the natural world. Fr Eugene Stockton reflects: "Jesus' familiarity with nature and society was not simply the fruit of passive observation, but surely came out of a sense of alertness, curiosity, interest and empathy with his surrounds". Today in urban places the earth is buried under concrete structures and it is increasingly difficult to connect with nature. How do we cultivate that sense of alertness, curiosity, interest and empathy with our surrounds? Eugene Stockton, *Wonder a Way to God*



Image: [goo.gl/GBgVhT](http://goo.gl/GBgVhT)

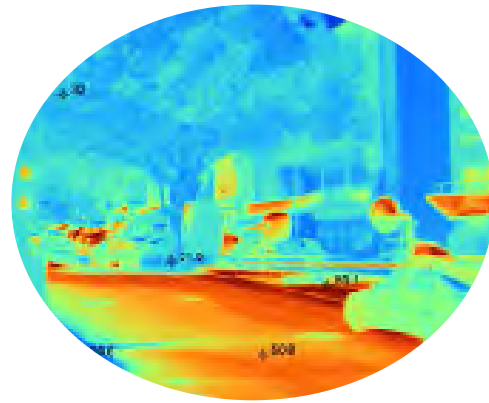
Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* says "there is a need to protect those common areas, visual landmarks and urban landscapes which increase our sense of belonging, of rootedness, of "feeling at home" within a city which includes us and brings us together". #151

Get to know the place where you live. Imagine what it was like before it was built on. Who were the Aboriginal people who lived there? Find a quiet place to reflect on the words of Teilhard de Chardin, "there is a communion with God, and a communion with earth, and a communion with God through earth".

*"Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment - but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading."*

Richard Louv

## God Challenging.....



Heat island effect. Image: [goo.gl/wT26Yh](http://goo.gl/wT26Yh)

The City of Melbourne's Urban Forest Strategy aims to mitigate the heat island effect by regenerating its trees. [goo.gl/So22C](http://goo.gl/So22C)  
How can you protect existing trees and plant new local species in a place near you? Look at aerial photos of your suburb to connect the "green" corridors.

View "The Story of Stuff" video: [storyofstuff.org/](http://storyofstuff.org/). Discuss how you can reduce consumption.

Help keep children connected with nature by creating an outdoor prayer place at your church. Join a Family Nature Club which exist in cities around Australia. Keep a balance between learning new information and encouraging wonder and joy. [goo.gl/6brjES](http://goo.gl/6brjES)



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# The Grace of My Place

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## 6th Sunday of Lent

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer  
Lk 22: 14-23: 56

*"In their commitment to place  
- a vow of sorts  
that humans make to  
bind themselves somewhere to  
a piece of earth -  
they discover that the land  
grounds and shapes them."*

*Dale Coulter*



Image: [goo.gl/p9p73m](http://goo.gl/p9p73m)

## God Revealing.....

Wherever "my place" is, I share it with other species. It is part of an interdependent ecosystem containing complex, wondrous forms of life, functioning for their own purposes. Scientists estimate there are around 8 million species on Earth, the majority of which exist on land. 86% of all species on land and 91% of those in the seas have yet to be discovered, described or catalogued. <http://journals.plos.org/plosbiology/article?id=10.1371/journal.pbio.1001127>

Science has given us the gift of naming species. Getting to know the names of species helps to get to know more about them, to become more curious about them. Charles Darwin's observations about the origin of species began with observing the worms in his place.

Investigate your place using a hand lens. Look at a flower or an insect to discover what it is all about. "It has etched for itself a place in the web of time and place that is unique. It has honed its qualities to this end. It has evolved to this end, just as we have, in a different life direction from ours. Each species is a unique real-isation of living possibility: biologically as complex as I am, genetically related to me", [John Feehan, The Singing Heart of the World](#).

*"The future belongs to those who give the next generation reason for hope."*

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

## God Inspiring.....

My place is where I feel most "at home", where I feel I belong, where I can relate honestly with those I love, where family stories are created and shared. Aboriginal peoples have storylines that connect them from where they grew up to where they are now. They keep on telling those stories.

We are called to create deep ecological connections to the place we call home. "I listened to the ancient, familiar, immortal, dear cricket sound under all the others, hearing at first some distant chirps; but when these ceased I was aware of the general earth-song, which my hearing had not heard.... and I wondered if behind or beneath this there was not some other chant yet more universal...", [Thoreau, in Guy Murchie, The Earth Speaks](#).

Jesus took his place at table with his disciples to share the Passover meal in a place they had prepared. In the Eucharist, "we symbolically bring the whole creation to the table of God". [Denis Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World](#).

Jesuit palaeontologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was convinced that the risen Christ is now at work in the whole universe, transforming it with His own presence. He sees our participation in the Eucharist as part of this transformation.

Transformation helps us become more aware of the suffering that is happening around the world. We can turn this awareness into action.

Prayer:

Watch and reflect on the Deer's Cry video: [goo.gl/NFVP4J](http://goo.gl/NFVP4J)

## God Challenging.....

Pope Francis says in *Laudato Si'*:

1. "Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us." #33. Sit in your place for 15 minutes a day. Identify species and learn their names. Learn about Habitat Stepping Stones. [www.habitatsteppingstones.org.au](http://www.habitatsteppingstones.org.au)
2. "The technological paradigm has become so dominant that it would be difficult to do without its resources and even more difficult to utilise them without being dominated by their internal logic". #108 Have a technology free day.

Read the Vatican report about the Anthropocene: a new geological era caused by human activity. [goo.gl/l5A0q6](http://goo.gl/l5A0q6)



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# The Grace of Place

## Donation Form

- The Grace of Place is an online Catholic Lenten Resource that is useful for implementing Laudato Si' within your school and parish.
- This online resource explores having a heightened sense of place in the natural world, enabling us to grow in our reverence for God, and in our care for all creation.
- It is suitable for Senior School Students, Teachers, Parishes, Religious Congregations, Youth, Social Justice Groups and individuals.
- There is no charge, however a donation for the use of this resource to enable our ongoing mission is appreciated.

For more information, visit: [www.columban.org.au](http://www.columban.org.au)  
 To make a donation,  
 email: [info@columban.org.au](mailto:info@columban.org.au) OR phone: 03 9375 9475

## Online Resource - Lenten Reflections The Grace of Place

GOD REVEALING, GOD INSPIRING, GOD CHALLENGING

"Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us." St Francis of Assisi

### Introduction

During Lent, we are invited to read and reflect on the Sunday Gospels with our senses open to the grace of place. Having a heightened sense of place in the natural world enables us to grow in our reverence for God, and in our care for all creation.

This lesson connects the Gospels of each Lenten Sunday in Year C with physical aspects of place where God is present. God's presence can be experienced through the natural world. God challenges us to be attentive, to embrace ecological care (Laudato Si').

### The six topics are:

- Wild Places
- Urban Places
- Rural Places
- Sacred Places
- Coastal Places
- My Place

St Francis of Assisi prayed, "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us". We are earthlings. Jesus was an earthling. Hebrew Scripture tells the story that we were formed "from the earth" (adamah).

"In Jesus of Nazareth, God has become an Earth creature, one of us, part of the interconnected web of life, so that all of Earth's creatures might be transformed in God"

Denis Edwards, Jesus and the Natural World

For Aboriginal peoples the place owns them. They do not own the place.

"My people have been so aware of Nature. It is natural that we will feel close to the Creator."

Miriam Rose Ungunmutter, Dadimi

The Earth is the place where we live, the first book of God's revelation. In the Genesis creation stories, God pronounces all creation very good, that is, full of grace.

Jesus was very much at home in his place in Galilee and the places he journeyed to. Those who visit where Jesus lived describe a feeling of a better understanding of not just the "messiness" of the person Jesus, but also the significance of his words and the imagery he employed in his teaching.

Having a sense of place is an essential part of existence for the survival of all species, human and non-human as we share where we live. It is the reason for ears, eyes, noses and other senseless parts of bodies.

But as sensible human beings, we know an awareness of place is more than survival. We like to belong to a place. Places care for us. Place is in our memories, telling the stories of where we have come from and helping define who we are. Place informs our world view. It is part of our culture, where we celebrate our rituals.

Pope Francis in Laudato Si' urges us to care for our common home because "this Sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her." #2

In our mobile, noisy, technological urban age that is increasingly disconnected from the natural world, it is becoming more difficult for many of us to appreciate God's gift of place.

They know their country because they learn from the earliest age the proper behaviour through watching, listening and telling their stories. These stories connect them to their people, the water, the land, the sky, the animals and the plants. Their tracks through country follow the storylines that connect places. We are blessed in Australia to have the opportunity to learn from them.

By connecting to place we can learn deep listening and find God revealed there. We can meditate in wonder at the diversity of life. We can reflect in sadness that Earth, our common home is suffering. We can accept the challenges we face in helping care for our place.

"For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values."

Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #148



image: Denise Shattersbook.com



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