

Study and Stillness

at

Stanbrook Abbey

A collection of reflections and poems from the Community Study
Day on the environment led by Jonathan Tulloch on 11 June 2016

In memoriam AnnFrances Dunn

04.10.62 – 11.06.16

On this day, the Community, together with oblates and local friends, met
to study and reflect upon our environment, inspired by Pope Francis's
acclaimed encyclical letter

LAUDATO SI'

Laudato si', mi' signore

Praise be to you, my Lord

'Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.'

Yet we are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and fullness (para. 53 of Laudato si').

The Hymn of St Francis of Assisi

Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven You formed them clear and
precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather
through whom You give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

One of the activities during the Study Day involved observing the natural life within a metre square quadrat for half an hour. Alternatively one could simply sit and observe whatever was in view, say, through a window. Participants were then invited to share their findings by creating a poem or a piece of prose. Some chose to paint; one made an embroidery. A selection of these creative pieces is recorded below.

THE PEACOCK IN SPRING

The Peacock in all his spring plumage
Marches round majestic
Regaling his fan of feathers
To all nature sing praise
Christ is risen, Alleluia!

by Abbess Andrea

*These lines were written as our friend, AnnFrances, was dying, and recited
probably at the moment she died*

*We are called to be instruments of God our Father, so that our planet might be what
he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty and
fullness (53).*



WISTERIA IN THE GARTH

in memoriam AnnFrances Dunn d. 11. 06. 16

They stand, four-square,
in the quadrat garth
like regal drapes,
shrouding the cloister walk,
yet springing, gothic, upward,
the light and shade of psalmody,
a space in harmony,
a purple threnody;
not grapes of wrath
but deeply Paschal trophies:
Vexilla Regis.

Above, a laurel wreath
of bees
hums Christ's victories.
No combat squadrons, these
W i s T e r i a S,
this perfect tetrarchy of flowers,
commands my eyes: 'rise'
to the true King's standards,
the heavenly powers.

Sister Laurentia

*We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason
each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved,
each of us is necessary (65).*



A TINY PATCH OF WOODLAND

I noticed a minute fly on a blade of grass
crawling towards a rain drop resting on the tip of
the blade. Having once been desperately thirsty
and unable to drink – I found myself longing for
everyone in the world to have access to clean water.

Rosemary Roberts



The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all (95).

As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things:

‘Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest’ (John 4:35).



A MINUTE CREATURE



Along the forest path, directly north from the Monastery,
I sat and looked at a really tiny blade of grass,
just one,
in front of the brambles.
There was nothing moving there.

So I just continued looking at that,
as there was no other focus.

Hang on...there *is* a minute creature,
say 2mm long,
barely visible,
but it *is* there.

He has wings,
but he *climbs* up the blade of grass –
maybe 3 minutes to climb 2 cm.

Is this what we look like,
when God looks down from above the M6?

My insect reached the top,
the grass did not even bend,
he was so tiny.

That's it!
He didn't hop around,
he didn't fly off,
he didn't climb down again.

I watched for at least 5 minutes,
he just sat there,
sometimes flexing his minuscule wings –
so tiny and yet so translucent.
Could he fly off if he wanted to?
Or is that the little bit of the world he where he belongs?

Chris Pritchard

FERNS

I look down at my feet
Nascent ferns emerging from decay
Two of them
Cool, green bridges
Smooth with potential.
Prostrate at the feet of their wavering, shimmering sisters.
Cool, green.
A plant about to be born or a drama waiting to happen?

The cycle goes on like the drama
Of a rose or of Man.
The fern is born, rises, flourishes
And poised for a second at the zenith of its beauty
Withers, decays and falls back to sleep in the earth.

Dark, private, gentle in its own existence.
Deep cold, rain, snow.
And next year, in the forest,
Spring and the ferns will come.

Bev Hallam



One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy (99).

FLYWOOD

On finding a small piece of bark shaped like a fly.

Have it your own way, starling.

I can mimic too.

Cracked and splintered

Aeons wintered...

Tossed aside barking up the wrong tree?

Then recognised as improvised

Like some Jurassic insect,

Spied beneath Our Lady's mantle

Glistening with tiny whirlpools

At last – hands to tease out my story.

Sister Julian

Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection...Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its way a ray of infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things
(‘Catechism of the Catholic Church’ 339).

I'M A BUTTERCUP

I'm a buttercup.

I don't know why I'm here.

But it seems a piece of cheek to expect buttercups to be thinking like me.
I was going to go on about people thinking I'm attractive – a very particular,
deep shade of yellow.

There are daisies around and they seem to be looking for the sun as I suppose
I am.

And then there's the grass

In fact, there's not just grass, there's lots of different sorts of green
leaved stuff all around me.

And not just round me but as far as the eye – I suppose that's the human's eye?
– can see.

We get mown – or cropped by the sheep but it doesn't seem to matter.

Cropping feeds the sheep.

But mowing?? 'cos people think it looks nicer?

On the other side of the drive, against the new wall, it's not mown at all and
there's lots more flowers, not just buttercups and daisies, but purple things as well
and they grow much higher.

So when does cutting things start despoiling the environment

Or Pope Francis start getting worried?

Perhaps it's when the birds stop singing

Cos I can hear the birds and it's rather nice.

Perhaps that's why I'm here – to listen to the birds sing.

I wonder whether I'd like to fly like them.

I wonder if it's less boring for birds than buttercups.

Talking of sheep, I'm not sure I like the row they're making –
maybe that's why they like chewing me.

If God knows every hair on a human head
Do you think he knows all about me?

Sure to, dear, but it's time for tea.

Fr Richard ffield OSB

LAUDATO SI'...

We are taking the rain-washed air:

A warren of rabbits,

Three murmuring wood pigeons,

A tall stepping crow,

And me.

I'm a hare, up on my haunches,

Enjoying the breeze rippling my ginger shoulders.

I swipe my paws together

And contemplate the view.

I see the rabbits with their noses in the grass industriously nibbling,

The pigeons stalking seed-heads,
And the crow opening his beak to caw as he flies
Up to a bare treetop
Swaying against a sky vast and pale as wood anemones.
And I think: Can I jump that high?
So up I spring with all my strength,
And tumble head over heels in the grass.
And again I jump
And again,
And fall head over heels, head over heels.
So I wriggle up on my haunches
And think it's enough to be here
In this cool grassy meadow
With the pigeons and the rabbits and the soft wind.
Then I clap my paws together
And settle down to contemplate the view.

Sister Petra



ATTENTIVE STILLNESS

Attentive stillness
Revealing hidden richness
Of the earth and sky.

*

Wrapped in the silence –
Attentive to sight and sound –
My spirit was filled.

*

Sister Raphael



MEADOW

No sun – to look beyond the
gaze of white tight-shut
petal, a silent green the
line of wood and air – to float
each colour, pink and yellow
clover's dark wave of
crowded companions.

No words – still bird
to listen lightly
echo
echo

each grass blade sway
to catch the breeze of
gold and bronze, melt
the day peace-given moments
to light a fleeting shade
of memory, sand beach
distant meadow, with
no words – still bird
to listen lightly

echo

echo

Anji Dowson



The very flowers of the field and birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence (100).

RANUNCULUS REPENS REFLECTIONS

I saw a central hub, rather like our monastic community with
Christ,
pivotal, at its centre
Sending out leafy runners, radiating, spreading rapidly, Benedictine 'good works'
Pushing out, rooting, forming new plants, spreading the Word
Tri-lobed leaf, strong, jagged edges, fresh and green: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Yellow flowers flaring, beacons, our daily prayer.
The Creeping Buttercup
Some might say persistently pestiferous

Andrea Brewster

The bishops of Japan observed:

To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope.' This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since 'for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice (85).



STILL STANDING

I'm all taped up,
from head to toe.
Not to worry,
safe from icy snow.

They've stood me here,
Outside the Church.
Because they're afraid that I might lurch;
and shatter into
many pieces.

But underneath my cover,
where swallows swoop and fly,
My heart still beats so firmly,
and hopes are held up high.

One day they may come to mend me,
and cover all the cracks.
But being hewn from simple stone,
I doubt they'll let me play for the all-blacks.

Lorraine Canning

*[poem inspired by St Benedict's statue, standing outside the Church at
Stanbrook Abbey, Wass]*

STILLNESS AT STANBROOK

On a still grey morning the mist has cleared
But the grasses are moving and an insect appears
Can I identify it? No not now, for it moved on
And I look around.
A monk seated looks down at his quadrant of string,
Is there anything moving I wonder again.

A wood pigeon calls and so does the peacock,
I collect some samples – a leaf and a cone
A black feather but the rabbit dung I'll leave to sit on its own.

A talk follows as does lunch
A sheep rolls over and starts to munch
Down to the reed bed I should see something there
A rabbit dashes by and a bird lands on the fence
I think it's a wagtail as it bobs up and down
So I take a photograph and I still can't tell.*

Oh bother he thinks,
...but what a wonderful Day!

John Green

* [It was a juvenile grey wagtail]

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to the span of life?

Matthew 6: 25-27



BEAUTY EVERYWHERE I LOOK...

the green flowers of the lupin leaves
bedecked with diamond dewdrops
every glistening buttercup
every nettle leaf or bud
every common clover leaf a marvel
no need to hunt for four leaves or five
hawthorn blossom at every stage of bud or blossom or demise
thistledown snagged among the spears of grass
tiny bright-faced speedwell
every season at once in one despised dock leaf,
green, crimson, yellow, brown
grey paper-dry beech and oak leaves
sandstone striped by years in ancient river
piece of plank subtly coloured by years of weather, lichen, silvery slug-slime-
and the slug itself!
tiny horns a testimony to the Creator's tenderness and skill
the dazzling peacock acts all these off the stage
until you hear its voice:
I too am but a creature

Sister Philippa



One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the Incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy (99).

ENDPIECE

Saint Basil the Great described the Creator as 'goodness without measure', while Dante Alighieri spoke of 'the love which moves the sun and the stars.' Consequently, we can ascend from created things 'to the greatness of God and so to his loving mercy' (77).



In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word 'creation' has a broader meaning than 'nature,' for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance and...can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion (76).

Figures in brackets refer to the sections of *Laudato si'* by Pope Francis.
We should like to put on record our gratitude to Jonathan Tulloch
for so inspiring a day.

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