News
EarthBeat
Trees in a snowy woods, with tiny doors painted near their roots. (Photo by Brenna Davis)

(Photo by Brenna Davis)



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PAUSE

READ

> *The pale flowers of the dogwood outside this window are saints. The little yellow flowers that nobody notices on the edge of that road are saints looking up into the face of God.*
>
> *This leaf has its own texture and its own pattern of veins and its own holy shape, and the bass and trout hiding in the deep pools of the river are canonized by their beauty and their strength.*
>
> *The lakes hidden among the hills are saints, and the sea too is a saint who praises God without interruption in her majestic dance.*

> *The great, gashed, half-naked mountain is another of God's saints. There is no other like him. He is alone in his own character; nothing else in the world ever did or ever will imitate God in quite the same way.*

Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*

> *Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.*

Exodus 3:5

REFLECT

When we consider the conservation of land and nature, it is tempting to think first of grand places like the Amazon rainforest or of the sequoias, but how often do you pause and remember that the land on which you stand is holy ground?

Last winter I decided to walk in a park that I often visit near my house. I am not sure if it was the light, beautiful snowfall that made me slow down and be more attentive than usual, but as I meandered, I noticed that someone had painted small doors — as if for animals, or maybe gnomes — on a pair of trees that I had passed many times.

It is hard to describe, but because it was so unexpected, the moment felt magical and holy. I was overcome by a deep sense of joy and gratitude for this particular place and actually laughed out loud alone on the path.

While the doors were obviously not natural features like Merton mentions, the experience of slowly strolling and making this silly discovery opened up a heartfelt sense of awe in me: at the wholly (holy) ordinary, but unique, land where I live, for the people and creatures that inhabit it and for the loving Creator with such a big imagination to create something so small, specific and joyful.

These moments of awe and transcendence cannot be forced or generated by our will alone, but when we walk on the land where we live with an openness and attentiveness to its holiness, even in its ordinariness, we are sometimes granted the grace to experience God's deep love for us through particular parts of creation.

In a beautiful cycle, these moments help us foster a deep sense of gratitude and respect for the land and its sacredness, which centers us in our vocation to be stewards and protectors, not exploiters, of the land.

Consider:

- When have you experienced unexpected moments of awe for a piece of land or in your everyday life?
- What are the unique gifts of the land where you live?
- Who stewarded the land where you lived before it was colonized? Is there more you'd like to learn about their relationship to the land?

ACT

Take an awe-walk where you live, approaching the landscape with attentiveness and fresh perspective and with an openness to the Holy Spirit to lead you in your journey.

An awe-walk can be done in rural or urban settings, and if you are unable to get outside, you can even take an awe-walk indoors, taking time to notice all of the small ways that the land where you live sustains you. For example: Slowly walk around your kitchen, noticing all of the food and sustenance that has come from the land through the work and hands of your human family.

At Home in Creation

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