Opinion
EarthBeat



People in Yorba Linda, California, are seen near the Blue Ridge Fire Oct. 26, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Ringo Chiu)



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On this Season of Creation journey, we are nearing the end of the second week of this five-week celebration focused on praying and acting with all of the natural world.

If you are just joining us now, we have been taking a virtual nature therapy walk together as a way to deepen our communion with creation and our Creator. Welcome.

Last week, we explored the invitation to bring awareness to what is in motion around us.

For me, on Sunday afternoon, I noticed the slight movements of fluffy clouds floating against a baby-blue sky. As I grew more curious, I could see how the clouds' movements changed the shapes of the dark shadows that were cast on the hills some distance below.

It reminded me of the constant change happening around us, and how movement in one place could affect darkness and light somewhere else.

I was reminded again of the interconnectedness of all things.

This week's invitation: Attune to the sorrow of the Earth

This week, our prayer invitation will shift: to attune to the sorrow of the Earth.

In many ways, our first two invitations have been about opening to the song of creation — through the senses, the elements and motion. This week, we are invited to listen to the cry of creation and connect to our own sorrow for our role in the environmental crisis.

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This intention connects to the Holy Father's prayer intention for the month of September, to "pray that each of us will listen with our hearts to the cry of the Earth and of the victims of environmental disasters and the climate crisis, making a personal commitment to care for the world we inhabit." (I recommend watching the video of the pope's message and prayer intention.)

Pope Francis expressed similar sentiments of the role of repentance in our ecological conversion in his 2015 encyclical, "*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home":

> We are called to acknowledge our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation. ... To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God.

Reconciling our relationship with creation cannot happen without acknowledging the ecological sin that we are causing to living beings now and in the future. While acknowledging our personal sin is essential, it is important to also realize that our ecological sin is communal and collective.

We might remember that the idea of the "carbon footprint" was a public relations scheme orchestrated by the oil giant British Petroleum to shift the blame of the climate crisis from oil companies to individuals.

So during our prayer (and discernment for action), we can reflect on our ecological sin as both individual and corporate.

Related: What is ecological sin?

Repentance, right relationship with creation

The invitation for this week is to open to our sorrow with and for the Earth.

Notice the presence of creation through your physical sensations, and then open yourself to ways we are causing harm to this element.

It can be helpful to use a phrase such as "I'm sorry, God, for my harm of Sister Water." This is a phrase borrowed from the repentance verses of the Laudato Si' Chaplet, a simple prayer technique inspired by the "Canticle of the Creatures" composed by St. Francis of Assisi.

The repentance verses ask forgiveness from God for our harmful lifestyles and abuses of the four elements and all creation. When praying with this invitation this week, you can replace "Sister Water" with whatever element or creature you are encountering.

As I was praying with my sorrow recently, I asked forgiveness for the harm I was causing to Brother Bee (through pesticides) and Sister Air (through carbon emissions

and air-conditioning).

Opening to one's sorrow for creation can be intense, so it can be helpful to allow one's prayer to flow between expressions of sorrow, gratitude and discernment.

Francis is asking in *Laudato Si*' that we "become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it."

However, it is important to take care of our hearts to not get overwhelmed by despair. A bit of gratitude and opening to the will of the Spirit can help to be in right relationship with creation and be balanced.



(Unsplash/Cristina Gottardi)

One evening during my forest therapy training intensive in New Hampshire, we were offered the invitation to interact with a lake at our training site in whatever way we felt drawn.

Squatting by the side of the lake, I placed my open palms on the smooth surface of Sister Water, and began to skim the surface in rhythmic motions. Delighted by the sensation of the water on my bare skin, gratitude emerged in realizing how much we receive from the gift of water. I prayed a few verses from the praise verses of the Laudato Si' Chaplet: "Praise be you, my Lord, through Sister Water."

I then leaned in deeper, with my hands plunging deeper through the surface as I shifted my attention to Sister Water's cry. I closed my eyes as I thought of the ways we as a human race abuse Sister Water through overuse; the pollution caused by plastics and chemicals; the heating of the oceans through global warming. I then imagined all the places where water is scarce and communities suffer from a lack of potable drinking water.

As I looked up at the ripples of the water extending into the side of the other lake, I felt the water as a living being. Not an object or a resource but a living being, alive, with its pains and sorrows and joys like us.

A line from Francis' Prayer for Our Earth, included in *Laudato Si',* came to mind as I sifted the water through my fingers: "You are present in the whole Universe and the smallest of Your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists."

I captured a glimpse of how God relates to Sister Water, and to all beings, with tenderness. It invited me to relate to water with the tenderness of God, to treat water with more care and reverence.

As we continue to live the Season of Creation, consider praying with this invitation to open to the sorrow of creation. Can we trust that our hearts have the capacity to be with the Earth's pain so that God might transform it into action?

The gift of compassion is that it leads to connection and our deep sense of our communion with all beings held in the loving embrace of God.

This story appears in the **Praying With Creation** feature series. View the full series

.