

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

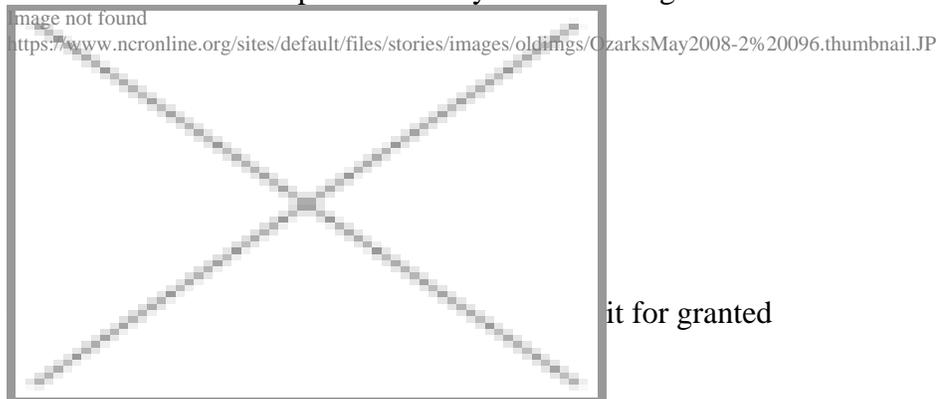
May 3, 2011 at 9:31am

We need the Earth for our spiritual lives

by Carol Meyer

Eco Catholic

Most of us don't realize just how much we need the Earth for our spiritual vitality and wellbeing. Because



the natural world is 'always there,' we take

it for granted

and seldom connect it to our spirituality. We think we need the church for our spiritual lives, but not nature. We assume our spirituality is independent of what is happening in nature.

Think for a moment how the major Catholic feasts are timed to coincide with events in nature. Look how much Christmas is built on the natural world. The winter solstice and symbolism of light overcoming the darkness mirrors Christ the light coming to remove the darkness of sin. The shepherd saw angels in the night sky and the magi followed a star (which we can hardly imagine because we can't see the stars where most of us live!) And wouldn't the story lose a lot if Jesus had been born in a run-down shelter in the inner city instead of a stable? The animals lend texture, earthiness, and warmth to the event.

And who would feel like celebrating Easter on the moon, for instance, where there is no new life springing out of the womb of Mother Earth? The reality of resurrection following death is much easier to assimilate because we see new life bursting out of the barrenness and seeming death of winter. The

feeling of aliveness that comes with a sunny, colorful spring day makes us more aware of Jesus as a living presence.

What if there were no flowers, plants, or candles burning bright at church, no sunshine streaming in the stained glass windows? What banners or other decorations could replace the beauty of these natural things? I don't know a church anywhere, even the poorest, that doesn't spend money on flowers. It is deemed that important to worship.

When I was at graduate school at St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, I felt as if I was in paradise. The university was nestled in the countryside in a perfect spot replete with tall evergreen trees and small lakes. I couldn't help but admire the Benedictine monks who managed to secure such an ideal piece of the planet for the uplifting of their spiritual lives.

Notice how most retreat centers are in beautiful, nature-based settings. It may not be conscious, but we know instinctively that God's creation is good for our souls, just as Jesus knew it. Gazing at distant vistas on a mountain, we can see God and our lives more clearly. Sitting by the ocean, we can feel the rhythms in our bodies and souls being restored as the steady pulse of the ocean calms our spirits.

We moderns have lost our sense of the sacredness of creation. Often we think of ourselves as spiritual beings in a non-spiritual world, which is terribly sad and erroneous. There is integrity between the divine, the natural, and the human.

The human-divine relationship is severely diminished without the natural world to give it substance and reality. Would we ever know the transcendence of God without experiencing awe in creation, where we are drawn out of ourselves into a mystery beyond the rational?

Every spiritual thought, feeling, and practice is dependent on the support of God's creation, a reality which should elicit profound gratitude, and an even deeper concern about how we are destroying this source of spiritual nourishment.

Thomas Berry says in *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* that, "Our Christian spiritual life is already being diminished as the basic faculties of the human soul are denied their inspiration from the larger context in which they function. Devastation of the outer world is simultaneously devastation of our inner world. To be isolated from the phenomenal order of the natural world is to be alienated from the deeper dimensions of our own being."

Thus we have before us one more deeply compelling reason to be more zealous in praying and working for the wellbeing of the planet.

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