Can you not buy five sparrows for two pennies?  
And yet not one is forgotten in God’s sight.  
— Luke 12:6

How often we hurry past small or big aspects of creation that call for the attention of our senses! Have we ever caught sight of an ant busy with assigned duties? (For a charming description, read Robert Frost’s poem, Departmental.) Have we noticed the moist feel of fog on our skin or the smell of fresh cut grass, an incoming storm, or soil? Have we attended to the architecture of a bee hive or a bird’s nest? Have we ever looked intently at a hazelnut as Julian of Norwich did, and appreciated it because God loves it? “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you…” (Job 12:7-8a)

Much of our awareness of creation has been anthropomorphic, “human-centric,” having interpreted “dominion” as exploitation rather than stewardship.¹ Expanding our expectation of a spiritual connection with the natural world may invite us to look more deeply at the creatures in nature. While some people never had pets growing up, others learned to see the “personalities” of a family dog, cat, or guinea pig. Some may have learned to value sentient life forms by watching nature programs. The psalmist sees that we and other beings are wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14)

Be or look outdoors. Praise God for our senses. Recognize and be amazed at the sensuality of the natural world. Notice the ant or the squirrel; let them teach you. Laugh at their antics. Praise God for them.

A Rabbit Noticed My Condition
I was sad one day and went for a walk;  
I sat in a field.
A rabbit noticed my condition and came near.  
It often does not take more than that to help at times –  
To just be close to creatures who are so full of knowing, so full of love that they don’t chat, they just gaze with their marvelous understanding.  
— St. John of the Cross²

¹Laudato Si, #115
CONTEMPLATIVE SITTING:
HELPFUL GUIDELINES

At the heart of contemplation is the awakening to the presence of God in the human heart and in the universe. A community gathered in contemplative sitting is grace flowing for the community, for the church, and for the world.

To begin a contemplative sitting or meditation practice, you may find it helpful to:

• Find a space that calls you into quiet (light a candle or play a chant if it aids stillness).

• Set a specific time for your sitting: 5, 10, 20, or 30 minutes.

• Set an intention for the session, dedicating it to a situation, a person, or a quality needed to grow in our world, such as truth, justice, peace, forgiveness, or courage.

• Become aware of your whole body as you enter into the silence; follow its rising and falling as you breathe in and out. You may wish to say *In* as you breathe in and *Out* as you breathe out, or repeat a mantra, such as “Holy One” – breathing in *Holy* and breathing out *One* – or “Maranatha” (Aramaic for “Come Jesus”).

• Gently note each time your mind begins thinking or feeling or planning – and gently bring attention back to your breath or mantra.

• Give gratitude to yourself for the time you dedicated to contemplative sitting.

It is important to remember that contemplative sitting is not about achieving a particular feeling or experience. It is simply sitting in God’s loving presence, coming into present moment, calming the mind by following your breath in and out or repeating your mantra. Contemplative sitting is an encounter with God in the midst of our daily lives.

— Esther Kennedy, OP

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