

Educating for *Laudato Si*
Experiential Learning Session: Nature-based Pilgrimages in Assisi

FSE theme: Sacramental ecology

***Laudato Si* Action Plan Goal:** Ecological Spirituality

Group: Any age

Learning Goals:

- Learn about the particular sacred place of Assisi and its history as a place of pilgrimage.
- Experience the interrelatedness of the natural elements in this sacred place.
- Foster greater awareness for the sacredness of creation and responsibility for its care.

Materials needed: walking shoes, notebook, pen, pencil

Estimated Time to Complete Activity: half a day or a day

General Outline of Experience

1. Gathering and prayer
 - a. Gather together at the place of outset.
 - b. Scripture passage: *Micah* 4:2: “Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of Jacob that he may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.”
 - i. Discuss “What is a pilgrimage?” Journeying to a place of special significance (shrine of a saint or a remarkable geographical feature); journeying to a place as a group, reaching the destination, encountering special aspects (nature), praying/meditating/ absorbing the surrounding elements, group sharing, returning home.
 - ii. Possible questions: Why go up a mountain? How do you think he will teach us His ways as we walk? How do we know we are on the right path? Why do we make a pilgrimage with others?
 - c. *Laudato Si*’ quotes:
 - i. “Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love, teach us to contemplate you in the beauty of the universe, for all things speak of you. Awaken our praise and thankfulness for every being that you have made. Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined to everything that is”. (*Laudato Si*, n. 246)
 - ii. Prayer/reading to begin the pilgrimage ,and periodically through the climb/walk, sing verses from the song *Laudato si mi Signore*
2. Opening Activity
 - a. At entrance: reading from *Laudato Si*, n. 84-85: “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, His boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, is a caress of God. . . ‘From panoramic vistas, to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine. . .’

‘To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope.’”

- b. Talk about the interrelatedness of creation and man, referring to *Laudato Si*, n. 92: “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of His creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

3. Orientation to Activity:

- a. Presentation of the specific holy place: Hermitage of the Carceri, San Damiano, LaVerna, Montelucio
- b. Why it is sacred: Stories from life of St. Francis; Sacred woods in Roman times
- c. The natural elements characteristic of the sacred place/woods: vegetation, soil, rock formations, water, animal life
- d. Each pilgrim receives a small “Franciscan journey” booklet containing quotes from scripture, poems, readings, etc. for the activity.

4. Performance of the Activity

- a. The pilgrims enter the sacred place together in silence. The pilgrim leader points out significant examples of vegetation related to the holy place. As the pilgrim group moves along, examples are shown of the interrelatedness of the type of soil, rock, water or lack of water with respect to the vegetation.
- b. “Silence” and “No picnicking” signs are pointed out.
- c. After walking through the sanctuary together, the pilgrims are asked to go individually for a period of time and select a place/s to observe/reflect on the nature around them.
- d. Each pilgrim is invited to express thoughts, feelings, emotions evoked by being in the sacred place: writing, drawing, singing, dancing, also using the “Franciscan journey” booklet for reflections.

5. Enjoyment of the fruits of the activity

- a. After a period of time the pilgrims gather together (could be an hour or several hours depending on the group and weather conditions).
- b. Pray together the *Canticle of the Creatures*.
- c. The pilgrims are invited to share the expression of their experience with the group, if they so choose.
- d. Concluding reading, for example, *Laudato Si*, n. 244. “In the meantime, we come together to take charge of this home which has been entrusted to us, knowing that all the good which exists here will be taken up into the heavenly feast. In union with all creatures, we journey through this land seeking God, for ‘if the world has a beginning and if it has been created, we must enquire who gave it this beginning, and who was its Creator.’ Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.”

6. Integration of the Experience

- a. What aspect of nature was particularly striking/important to you?

- b. How did the silence of the sanctuary affect you? Which of your senses was most awakened?
- c. What did you experience/learn that was new?
- d. How did you experience sacredness?
- e. How did this place and the stories of St. Francis here make you feel closer to God? Were there particular natural aspects that spoke to you of God?
- f. Share/describe experiences of interrelatedness that you noticed (example: roots growing tightly intertwined in the rock)
- g. How do you experience interrelatedness with the creation around you in your daily life?
- h. Did that experience of interrelatedness awaken you to God's presence in creation?
- i. We worship God through participating in the sacraments, which are material signs pointing beyond themselves to a spiritual reality; they are material realities that become conduits of God's grace through rituals. Did you see elements today that remind you of particular sacraments?
- j. As you return home, how can you make a commitment to glorify God/promote the wonders of God's creation in a new way through caring for some aspect of creation in your daily life?

7. Auxiliary Activities/References

“Franciscan Journey” booklet, to include:

- St. Francis, *Canticle of the Creatures*; Scripture references; St. John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*; Gerard Manley Hopkins, *God's Grandeur*; A Christian prayer in union with creation from *Laudato Si*
- Texts for these references:

The Canticle of the Creatures by St. Francis of Assisi, 1225

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing,
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no human is worthy to mention Your name.
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 splendor;
and bears a likeness to 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 pure.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night,
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces varied fruit with coloured flowers and herbs.
Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, shall they be crowned.
Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.
Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

Psalm 96: 11-13

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;
let the sea roar and all that fills it;
let the field exult, and everything in it.
Then let all the trees of the forest sing for joy
before the Lord

Job 12: 7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;
the birds of the air, and they will tell you;
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.
Who among all these does not know
that the hand of the Lord has done this?
In his hand is the life of every living thing
and the breath of every human being.

Matthew 6: 28

And why do you worry about clothing?
Consider the lilies of the field,
how they grow; they neither toil nor spin,
yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory
was not clothed like one of these.

from St. John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation*, Message for World Day of Peace, 1 January, 1990

He offers Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. As a friend of the poor who was loved by God's creatures, Saint Francis invited all of creation - animals, plants, natural forces, even Brother Sun and Sister Moon - to give honor and praise to the Lord. The poor man of Assisi gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which is inseparable from peace among all peoples. It is my hope that the inspiration of Saint Francis will help us to keep ever alive a sense of 'fraternity' with all those good and beautiful things which Almighty God has created."

God's Grandeur (George Manley Hopkins)

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

A Christian prayer in union with creation from *Laudato Si*

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts

and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!

Triune Lord, wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness
for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.