



Finding God in the Wilderness

A Prayer Service Series for the Season of Creation

Why celebrate the Season of Creation with an “ecological conversion?”

During the Season of Creation (September 1st—October 4th), Christians across the earth come together to pray and care for creation. Today, indifference and spiritual apathy towards God’s gift of creation and the people impacted by its exploitation have led to what Pope Francis calls “an ecological crisis.” (LS 217) For Catholics, this crisis is “a summons to a profound interior conversion.” To end the evil of environmental destruction, we must start by examining our own broken relationships with God, with one another and with creation and choosing to open our hearts to an ecological conversion.

Finding God in the Wilderness

Finding God in the Wilderness is an invitation to ecological conversion inspired by St. John the Baptist, who ventured into the wilderness to know God more fully. He returned from the wilderness ignited with love for the Creator and a fervent desire to prepare the way for the Messiah. We invite you, like John the Baptist, to embark on a spiritual journey into the wilderness to encounter God in a new way, and to come forth ready to help inspire a similar conversion in others.

What is this prayer service series?

Finding God in the Wilderness is a four-part series designed to be prayed each Sunday after Mass during the Season of Creation. Each service lasts about 10-15 minutes and incorporates a reflection on the Mass readings for each week, viewed through the lens of creation care. The series culminates in Catholic Climate Covenant’s Feast of St. Francis program.

The structure of this prayer service series is based loosely on St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. Like the Spiritual Exercises, the four weeks of this prayer service series follow a progression of four different themes meant to encourage spiritual conversion. Each service also follows the structure of the Daily Examen, a method within the Spiritual Exercises of reflecting on the day’s events and noticing God at work within them. Finally, *Finding God in the Wilderness* follows the Ignatian tradition by being contemplative in nature and focusing on knowing God through one’s emotions.

How can I pray it?

1. Gather a prayer group

Finding God in the Wilderness can be prayed alone, but is best prayed in a small group of 3-10 people.

2. Find a quiet, peaceful place

An outdoor space is best, but you can also pray in the pews after Mass, or in a parish hall or other gathering place.

3. Let the Holy Spirit speak through your emotions

As you follow the Prayer Service Series Guide, pay attention to what you feel as you reflect on past events, and to what God may be trying to say to you.

4. Continue your prayer through action

Each prayer service in the series ends with a suggestion of a concrete action of creation care. Commit to a small action each week as a way of continuing this prayer throughout the Season of Creation.





Finding God in the Wilderness

Sunday, September 3, 2017

Week One: God's Boundless Love

Thanksgiving

Leader: Dear friends, we come together today giving thanks to God for the gift of creation and the beauty of the human family. We praise Jesus for His sacrifice of love, and for the opportunity to celebrate this sacrifice together each week through the Mass.

Illumination

Leader: As we reflect on the readings from today's Mass, we seek to understand them through the lens of God's creation. We call upon the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and help us to hear God's voice in these words.

A moment of silent reflection before Examination.

Examination

Reader 1:

My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.
O God, you are my God whom I seek;
for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts
like the earth, parched, lifeless and without water.
My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

Leader: God loves us boundlessly and deeply. We are made for God's love—we thirst for it with the same intensity that we thirst for water. God created the natural world out of this immense love as a gift to us. Water is a symbol of God's love: pure, perfect, and life-sustaining.

Reader 2:

Do not conform yourselves to this age
but be transformed by the renewal of your mind,
that you may discern what is the will of God,
what is good and pleasing and perfect.

Leader: We live in an age in which we misuse God's gift of creation out of greed and indifference. Now in the Southwest United States, rising temperatures have led to parched and lifeless earth. Plants wither and people suffer. This is one of many ways in which lack of concern for the environment translates to pain for our brothers and sisters. We must not continue to conform to this age of greed and wastefulness. Rather, let us be transformed. God calls us to conversion—a "renewal of our minds." We are called to open ourselves up to the contemplation of God's gift of creation, to recognize the depth of God's love for us, and to listen and respond to the cry of creation and the poor.

Gratitude/Contrition

Leader: As we look back on this past week, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through our memories and emotions. We remember the moments when we glimpsed God's beauty and power in creation. We give thanks for the times when we were able to serve God by caring for creation, and we offer our sincere contrition for the times when we failed to do so.

Leader asks questions one by one and invites participants to share their responses. If praying alone, participant may reflect on each question silently.

- Where was I most aware of God's beauty in creation last week?
- How did I make a conscious effort to care for God's creation last week?
- What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?
- How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation?

Adapted from the Ecological Examen by Joseph Carver, SJ

Hope

Leader: In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us: "All it takes is one good person to restore hope!" (LS 71) How will you be that one good person this week?

If in a group, participants are invited to share their responses aloud. Suggestions: Make a conscious effort to take shorter showers or donate to help victims of drought.

Leader: We close with a prayer of hope:

Reader 3:

God of love,
Today in the wilderness
Springs beauty like water.
Seeds lie in the dry earth
Awaiting the rains.
In once-parched deserts
Will flow mighty rivers.
Together in your love
We will realize our future.
In farms, fields, and cities
We will celebrate your justice,
And in loving community
Reap a harvest of hope.

*Prayer adapted from "Celebrating God's Justice" prayer
by Linda Jones, CAFOD website*



Finding God in the Wilderness

Sunday, September 10, 2017

Week Two: Following Christ As His Disciples

Thanksgiving

Leader: Dear friends, we gather today to give thanks for God's abundant good gifts of creation; for clean water and air, for food and shelter, and all animals and plants. We give thanks for the wisdom imparted during the Mass, and for the joy of loving all we encounter. We pray that as Christ's disciples, our hearts and minds may be radically transformed, so that we learn to heal the earth with gentleness and love.

Illumination

Leader: As we reflect on the readings from today's Mass, we seek to understand them through the lens of God's creation. We call upon the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and help us to hear God's voice in these words.

A moment of silent reflection before Examination.

Examination

Reader 1:

"Whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no evil to the neighbor; hence, love is the fulfillment of the law."

Leader: Christ's greatest commandment was to love our neighbor and to do no evil to our neighbor. Yet, a constant question is "Who is our neighbor?" Should we extend our love to all creation? Can we strive to do no evil to creation? If so, loving all of God's creation is the complete fulfillment of the law.

Reader 2:

"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation."

Leader: What incredible words! God unites with creation through Christ, and we, as Christ's disciples are gifted with the joyful task of spreading the good news of reconciliation, love, and peace, to all creation. We are entrusted to bring together – to make peace with – all of creation.

Climate change is a potent indicator of the mistreatment, exploitation, and oppression of creation. It is a manifestation of our failure to love and tend the garden of creation. As disciples of Christ, we cannot sit idly by as the impacts of climate change ravage our most vulnerable brothers and sisters and all life on earth. We are entrusted to take action and bring "reconciliation" to humanity and to our common home.

Gratitude/Contrition

Leader: As we look back on this past week, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through our memories and emotions. We remember the moments when we glimpsed God's beauty and power in creation. We give thanks for the times when we were able to serve God by caring for creation, and we offer our sincere contrition for the times when we failed to do so.

Leader asks questions one by one and invites participants to share their responses. If praying alone, participant may reflect on each question silently.

- Where was I most aware of God's beauty in creation last week?
- How did I make a conscious effort to care for God's creation last week?
- What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?
- How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation?

Adapted from the Ecological Examen by Joseph Carver, SJ

Hope

Leader: In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us: "All it takes is one good person to restore hope!" (LS 71) How will you be that one good person this week?

If in a group, participants are invited to share their responses aloud. Suggestions: I will heal the earth with gentleness and love by eating less meat. Even one day of meatless meals will make a difference in our carbon footprint.

Leader: We close with a prayer of hope:

Reader 3:

Closing prayer: (This Pledge of Commitment may be read in unison or in alternation)

Pledge of Commitment *To Protect and Heal God's Creation*

We have come to renew our covenant with God and with one another in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

We have come to help protect God's creation.

We have come as followers of Jesus to commit ourselves anew to one another and to heal injustice and poverty.

We have come to stand together against all threats to life.

We have come to discover some new beauty every day in God's creation: the sunrise and sunset, birds, flowers and trees, rainbows in the sky, the stars, the many forms of life in the forest.

We will remember always that God speaks to us through the beauty of creation, and we will

try our best to answer God's call to reverence for all creation.

Prayer adapted from Prayers to Care for Creation, by the USCCB



Finding God in the Wilderness

Sunday, September 17, 2017

Week Three: Christ's Passion and Death

Thanksgiving

Leader: Dear friends, we gather to give thanks to God for God's boundless mercy and the rich abundance of creation. Through God's generosity, we have everything that we need to live and we choose to live with love.

Illumination

Leader: As we reflect on the readings from today's Mass, we seek to understand them through the lens of God's creation. We call upon the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and help us to hear God's voice in these words.

A moment of silent reflection before Examination.

Examination

Reader 1:

When [the King] began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, "Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full."

Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan.

Leader: The sin of greed so strongly infects the human heart that each of us has amassed a huge ecological debt. We eat more food than we need, waste more water than we require, admit more pollution than the earth can bare. Yet, even as we destroy God's creation God is willing to forgive us. God is always willing to forgive us.

Reader 2:

I give you a new commandment, says the Lord; love one another as I have loved you.

Leader: Jesus challenges each of us. Can we replace the greed in our hearts with love? Can we replace the stinginess in our hearts with love? Can we replace the indifference in our hearts with love?

Adherence to this commandment is why the King was able to forgive his debtor, because the King loved his servant more than he desired money. But the debtor did not forgive his servant, because even though he was given love, he refused to give it himself.

Question: What changes can I make in my life so that I more fully love God's creation?

Gratitude/Contrition

Leader: As we look back on this past week, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through our memories and emotions. We remember the moments when we glimpsed God's beauty and power in creation. We give thanks for the times when we were able to serve God by caring for creation, and we offer our sincere contrition for the times when we failed to do so.

Leader asks questions one by one and invites participants to share their responses. If praying alone, participant may reflect on each question silently.

- Where was I most aware of God's beauty in creation last week?
- How did I make a conscious effort to care for God's creation last week?
- What challenges or joys do I experience as I recall my care for creation?
- How can I repair breaks in my relationship with creation?

Hope

Leader: In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis reminds us: "All it takes is one good person to restore hope!" (LS, 71) How will you be that one good person this week?

If in a group, participants are invited to share their responses aloud. Suggestions: I will work to lower my ecological debt by researching ways to use less electricity or lower my food waste.

Leader: We close with a prayer of hope:

Reader 3: Generous God, we thank you:

For the gifts you have given us,
the abundance of your Creation,
and the beauty that surrounds us.

For the people whose lives have touched ours,
for the love they show,
the burdens they lift,
the hopes we share.

Compassionate God, we ask you:
to fill us with your love,
to place in our hearts a spirit of courage,
to move us to reach out to others in need.

And lead us to play our part,
so that now and in generations to come
all your children may share
in our hope for a better world.

We ask this through Christ our Lord,

Amen.



Finding God in the Wilderness

Sunday, September 24, 2017

Week Four: Christ's Resurrection and Our Call to Serve

Thanksgiving

Leader: Let us pray: God, we are awed by your creation and its constant cycles of transformation. Christ's resurrection is manifested in every season, whether it is a time to harvest, to plant, or to await new life. We gather today as we seek guidance for how to respond to the challenges and changes in our planet and in our lives. Amen.

Illumination

Leader: As we reflect on the readings from today's Mass, we seek to understand them through the lens of God's creation. We call upon the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts and help us to hear God's voice in these words.

A moment of silent reflection before Examination.

Examination

Reader 1: PHILL 1:20-21

"Brothers and sisters: Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ."

Leader: As we prepare for the celebration of the Feast day of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4th, we remember how St. Francis lived his Christian faith by embracing the poor, the broken, and all of creation. He embodied and modeled "living in Christ". Take a few minutes to consider how do you "live in Christ"? How do you answer the call to serve God and all creation?

Reader 2: MT 20:1-16A

" 'Why do you stand here idle all day?'
They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.'
He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.'"

Leader: The parable of the vineyard is a tough one for most of us. We tend to focus on the phrase "The first will be last and the last will be first." However, perhaps Christ's question of "Why do you stand here idle all day?" merits our attention. God's vineyard is in trouble. It needs tending. Should we stop idling and go into God's vineyard where together we embrace the poor, the broken, and all of creation? Do we answer the call to serve all of creation, just as St. Francis answered?

Gratitude/Contrition

Leader: As we look back on this past week, we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through our memories and emotions. We remember the moments when we glimpsed God's beauty and power in creation. We give thanks for the times when we were able to serve God by caring for creation, and we offer our sincere contrition for the times when we failed to do so.

Leader asks questions one by one and invites participants to share their responses. If praying alone, participant may reflect on each question silently.

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Adapted from the Ecological Examen by Joseph Carver, SJ

Hope

Leader: In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us: "All it takes is one good person to restore hope!" (LS 71) How will you be that one good person this week?

If in a group, participants are invited to share their responses aloud. Suggestions: I will take the St. Francis/ Laudato Si' Pledge and live out the vision of Laudato Si' and our Catholic faith through prayer, concrete action, and advocacy. Or I will be conscious of my food waste during the week and strive to reduce it as much as I can.

Leader: We close with a prayer of hope:

Reader 3:

Loving God,
May we never lose hold of the hope that is in you. We pray for our common home, scarred by conflict and natural disaster. Bring healing to its lands and cleansing to its waters. Bring justice to its peoples and peace to its nations. Bring life for today and hope for the future. God of all Eternity, ignite in us, your people, the hope that we will heal our broken world, and grow in us the perseverance to keep praying and working towards that day when your creation will once again be whole and free.

We ask all these things in and through the matchless name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer adapted from a responsive prayer from Hope for Creation