

Sacramental Vision

Contemplative author and artist Christine Valters Paintner honors the formal sacraments of the church while also inviting us to celebrate the sacramental nature of all life and all beings:

One of the classic definitions of a sacrament is something that is an outward, visible sign of an inward, invisible grace. In the Christian church there are different rituals that are considered to be sacraments. The Catholic Church has seven sacraments, while other denominations count fewer among their number. However, this idea of sacramentality extends beyond the formal sacraments such as Baptism, Matrimony, Communion, and the Anointing of the Sick. This sense of sacramentality, rooted in the Incarnation, extends our vision out to the world so that everything can be a sacrament, meaning every person, creature, plant, and object can be an opportunity to encounter something of the Divine Presence in the world. Sacramentality is a quality present in creation that opens us up to the Sacred Presence in all things. Sacraments reveal grace.

When viewed through this expansive lens, we discover that the more we cultivate intimacy with the natural world, the more we discover about God's presence. All of our interactions with nature can be sacramental, and all the ways nature extends herself to us are sacramental as well. Sacramentality breaks through our surface obsessions in the world and plunges us into the depth of the Sacred at every turn. It is a spontaneous reminder of God's creative upwelling and expansive love, calling us to love beyond boundaries. St. Isaac the Syrian [seventh century] defines a charitable heart as one "which is burning with love for the whole creation, for [humans], for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons—for all creatures."

Paintner talks about the shift that takes place when we see life in this way:

This discovery that every creature and every created thing can be a window of revelation into the divine nature is an invitation to fall more and more in love with the world. To see that teachers of grace exist everywhere means to bring a sense of reverence to the way we walk in the world. When we

encounter nature as sacrament, we can no longer objectify it. We can instead create the circumstances that nurture and nourish this kind of vision. . . . Sacramental vision means not only that we grow in our love of God's ways in the world but also that we grow in our sense of kinship with creation. . . .

There is a sense of God's incarnate presence in creation that shimmers forth to reveal the holiness of all things. Notice how your senses come alive when you walk out in the world aware of its sacramental nature. What do your eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and skin each reveal to you about how God is alive in the world around you?

Christine Valters Paintner, *Earth, Our Original Monastery: Cultivating Wonder and Gratitude through Intimacy with Nature* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2020), 93–94, 106.