**SPRED**

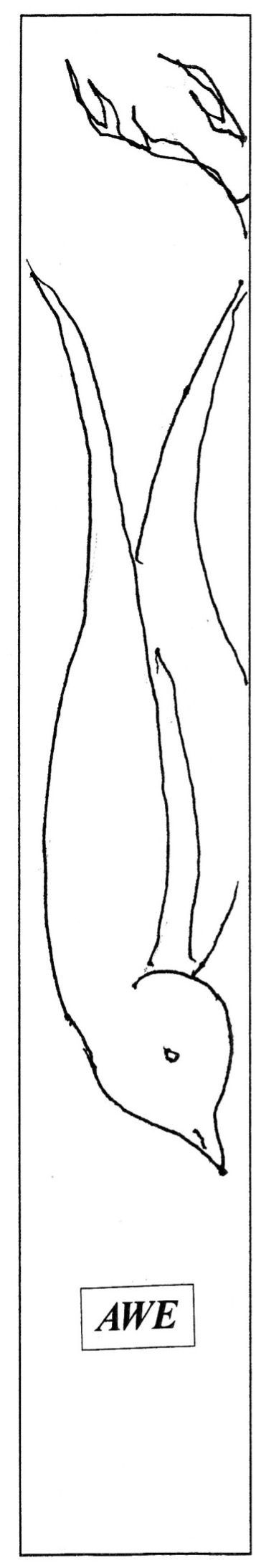
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In 2015, Pope Francis wrote a beautiful letter all about our natural world, calling creation, “a constant source of wonder and awe,” and “a continuing revelation of the divine.”¹ This letter is now widely known as *Laudato Si*—which are the opening words of St. Francis’ *Canticle Of The Creatures: Praise Be To You*. In Section #12, Pope Francis again refers to St. Francis who, “faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness.” He continues, “There is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, a mountain trail, in a dewdrop...”² Inspired by these words and with Pope Francis’ guidance, let us look at our SPRED Method and consider how we experience the natural world in our SPRED environment and what amazing things happen in the process.

As we gather in our beautifully prepared Preparation Room, each person is invited to choose an activity. These activities are part of our natural world: sand, water, wooden objects, flowers, plants, clay, paints (made from chalk, clay, marble, earth), paper (made from wood pulp, rice, water, plants). As we engage with these activities with care and enjoy their beauty, we are experiencing that “nature not only points to God but is itself the place of God’s presence.”³ We allow the sand to trickle through our fingers, the soap bubbles in the water to fill us with delight, the beautiful wooden blocks to thrill us with their smoothness. Our senses are filled to overflowing. We experience God speaking to us and granting us a glimpse of his infinite goodness.⁴ As people become absorbed in this calming and delightful process, an amazing silence permeates the whole group. Someone might drop something or someone cough, but these external noises do not disturb the peace. This mysterious silence is almost tangible. We take it with us to our Celebration Room.

The beauty of our Celebration Room reminds us that all liturgy is meant to touch us with God’s beauty. Here the Leader Catechist will present the object that will lead to an evocation of a human experience. This might be a beautiful bouquet of flowers, a picture of a mountain, a bowl of water, a nest, bread, pictures of trees or something to smell. Pope Francis dwells on the sacredness of all things, things that are sacred just by being themselves: plants, insects, deserts, oceans and skies, as well as people who are created in God’s image. Where we have seen these beautiful things is also significant. Pope Francis puts it this way:

“The history of our friendship with God  
 is always linked to particular places   
 which take on an intensely personal meaning:   
 we all remember places, and revisiting   
 these memories does us much good.”⁵



In our Celebration Room, how often have we reflected on and shared our memories of places where we have experienced joy, friendship, laughter, sadness. It might be our neighbourhood, our home, a country road, a walk along a riverside, a chat over a cup of coffee. Recapturing these moments and listening to others share, we sense a “oneness,” a connection with everyone and everything, without common home. These glimpses last forever because they touch eternity. No wonder we respond with silence.

I have a strong memory of one of our 11-16 group sessions during this Evocation of the Human Experience which I think typifies so many of our experiences. We had a tray of beautiful shells which drew everyone’s attention and then each one chose the one of their liking. I can see in my mind’s eye each person holding their shell in the palm of their hand with such reverence and care, eyes aglow with wonder. When we had all described our shell, we laid it carefully on a tray of sand, accompanied by awe, silence and stillness. “Surely God was in this place.”⁶

We had all touched creation in a shell and glimpsed the infinite beauty and goodness of our God.⁷ “Through the greatness and beauty of creation, one comes to know by analogy their maker.”⁸ St. Paul also reminds us of this great truth in his letter to the Romans:

“Ever since the creation of the world   
God’s eternal power and divine nature,   
invisible though they are, have been seen and  
understood through the things God has made.”⁹

In my very first SPRED group, there was a young woman just finishing University. After her first year in SPRED, she went on a walking holiday to the Highlands of Scotland and afterward she told me how enhanced her walk had been because of her SPRED experience. “I noticed the wildflowers in the hedgerows and took time to sit and admire the eternal beauty of the lochs. I walked slower than I would have done previously and used my eyes and ears in a very different way.”

I have remembered this story from 38 years ago because it made such an impression on me. It is easy to see the link between the natural and divine which Joseph Campbell expresses well:

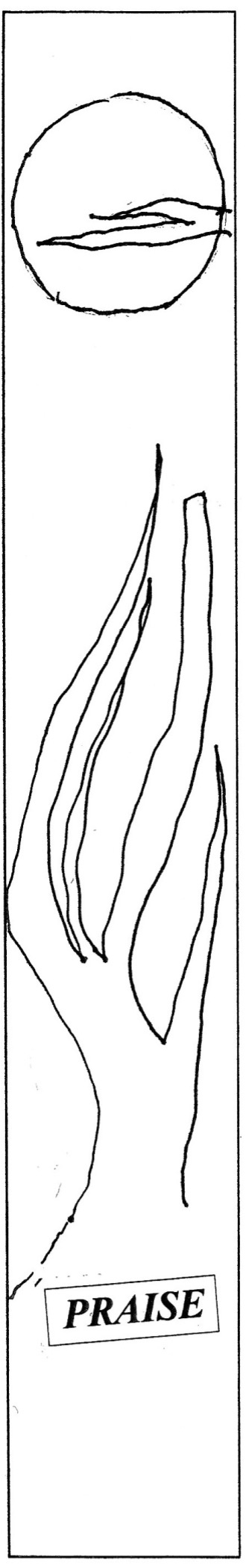
“When before the beauty of a sunset or a mountain,  
 you pause and exclaim ‘Ah’. You are participating   
 in the divinity.”¹⁰

As the session continues in the Celebration Room, the Leader Catechist proclaims the Word of God. Each one then reverently receives the message, an action of great beauty. Pope Francis talks of **“bodiliness”**¹¹ and says that it is the clearest window to the divine beauty.

Looking at the action of giving the message in slow motion, we see and hear one human being allowing the Word of God to flow through to another. “Deep speaks unto deep.”¹²

Such a beautiful action awakens all of us to our own mystery, made as we are in God’s likeness, and transforms us more deeply into it.

“For beauty we are born,  
 by beauty we are nourished.  
 From beauty we came.”¹³  
 Where true beauty is, God is.¹⁴



“Since music and dance play a huge part in making the invisible visible and the intangible, tangible,” we respond to God’s Word with song and movement.¹⁵

The group now relaxes in that awesome Presence and shares the silence. Once again we find that silence is our spontaneous response to this encounter with God and one another. There is in this room a harmony with one another and an unspoken but felt sense of belonging: we are all silently rejoicing in our shared experience and the uniqueness of each one. We are at home with one another, at one with all creation.

We might feel “*the air of the eternal is seeping through the physical,*” to quote the famous Scottish writer George Mac Leod, who also talks of special places as “thin places,” meaning that the distinction between the physical and the spiritual is only thinly veiled.¹⁶ Our Celebration room is one such place.

Pope Francis in *Laudato Si* has drawn us all to a deeper realization of all creation being a revelation of God and how God works all around us. Our SPRED sessions and our SPRED environment reveal the beauty of ordinary things and develop in us eyes of wonder.

Pope Francis brings to a close *Laudate Si* with *A Prayer For Our Earth*:

All powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and  
 in the smallest of your creatures.  
 You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  
 Pour out upon us the power of your love, that  
 we may protect life and beauty.  
 Fill us with peace that we may live as brothers and sisters...  
 O God of the poor helps us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten  
 of this earth, so precious in your eyes.  
 Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  
 that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  
 Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe  
 and contemplation, to recognize  
 that we are profoundly united with every creature  
 as we journey toward your infinite light.  
 We thank you for being with us each day...”

Sr. Agnes Nelson   
Glasgow, Scotland SPRED

1. *Laudato Si, #85*
2. *Ibid. #233*
3. *Ibid. #88*
4. *Ibid. #12*
5. *Ibid #84*
6. *Genesis 28:16*
7. *Laudate Si, #12*
8. *Wisdom 13:5*
9. *Romans 1:2*
10. *Brian Grogan, Finding God in a Leaf, pg 186*
11. *Laudate Si, #235*
12. *Psalm 42:7*
13. *Donald O’Leary, An Astonishing Secret, pg. 186*
14. *Ibid. pg. 187*
15. *Ibid. 189*
16. *John Phil Newell, Sacred Earth Sacred Soul, pg. 245*

CHICAGO SPRED CALENDAR

**Training/Orientation:**February 12, 19, 26, 2022 (2-1)  
March 12, 19, 2022 (3-1)  
SPRED Center  
30th and South Lowe Avenue  
Contact: Mary Ward, 312.842.1039 x 211

**SPRED Masks**   
Gifts for you and your community  
Contact: Mary Ward, 312.842.1039 x 211  
$10 donation to Mamre

**Observation:**   
Queen of Apostles   
Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday  
4412 North Western, Chicago IL 60625  
Contact: Julia Hess, 773.539.7510  
**queenofangelsspred.org/observation.html**

**Reflection Weekend:**   
January 7, 8, 9, 2022   
Contact: Julia Hess  
**queenofangelsspred.org/reflection-weekend.html**

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Special Religious Development

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