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# Reflections on Earth and Integral Ecology

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Welcome to the second month of our sixteen-month journey exploring together Mercy Global Presence! How blessed our first month has been as we imagined the cosmos mercified into being! We did so through the wonderfully diverse voices of Nellie McLaughlin rsm in her “Theological Imaginings: Out of Wonder,” accompanied by the powerful artwork of Oonagh Campbell rsm; through the mystical photo essay Maree Hutchinson rsm, entitled “Cosmos/Cosmology – Global heart/Global heartbeat”; through Anne Walsh’s profound questions in “Glimpses of God,” arising out of her ministry as a catechist; through the global perspective from Angela Reed rsm pondering these questions and “Responding to a Cosmological Narrative and Praxis”; and through Astrophysicist Janna Levin’s reading of Maya Angelou’s poem, “A Brave and Startling Truth.” These voices were creative, compassion-filled and challenging with additional riches in the reflective prayer, the musings, the facilitators’ guide and the good reading list. All those who added comments on the website further enriched our exploration. And, to think, we could pick and choose from among all these treasures as, either personally or in energizing groups, we pondered the beauty and the mystery of the cosmos.

In Genesis 9 (v. 13), we read what God says about the first covenant, “I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and Earth.” The liberation theologian, Leonardo Boff, reflects that you and I are daughters and sons of this rainbow, translating “this divine covenant with all the beings existing and living, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals.”

To help us, as daughters and sons of the rainbow, become more engaged in what that covenant between God and Earth means for each one of us and for all of us, let us spend some time reflecting on our own personal, intimate relationship with Earth. Where did my feet walk when I was young? Where do my feet touch Earth in these days? Where did my feet walk when I studied or when I made retreat or pilgrimage? Where have my feet walked in my ministry? Where have my feet touched Earth in my own country and outside my own country? Which bodies of water mean something special to me? What smells of earth or water still touch my spirit?

John Philip Newell reminds us that our intimate connection with Earth is not simply a consoling practice. Rather it is an essential way through which God speaks to us. Newell says:

The great Irish teacher, John Scotus Eriugena, taught that God speaks to us through two books. One is the little book, the book of scripture. The other is the big book, the book of creation. Just as God speaks to us through the words of scripture, so God speaks to us through the elements of creation. The cosmos is like a living sacred text that we can learn to read and interpret. Just as we prayerfully ponder the words of the Bible in Christian practice, and as other traditions study their sacred texts, so we are invited to listen to the life of creation as an ongoing, living utterance of God.

We have forgotten that the life of creation is an ongoing, living utterance of God. Today, we are blessed in this time in which we live to have vivid reminders of this truth. The eco-theologian, Michael Dowd, tells us that, grounded in the new cosmology, is deep ecology, “a worldview and associated way of life.” He says that ecology “branches out of the awareness that the environment is not ‘out there,’ separate from us, but that we are part of vast cosmological, geological and biological cycles which are concentric and interrelated.” Pope Francis introduced us to the phrase, integral ecology, in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, the Church’s first formal document on care for Earth. In *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis outlined three dimensions of integral ecology: (i) relationships at the atomic and molecular level, between plants and animals, and among species in ecological networks and systems; (ii) the profound interconnectedness of environmental, economic, political, social, cultural, and ethical issues; and (iii) the vision to think about comprehensive solutions to what is both an environmental and human crisis. The cry of Earth and the cry of the Poor are one.

It has been said about coincidences that “synchronicity is God sending us messages anonymously.” Just as we began the Mercy Global Presence process, we experienced two coincidences, two anonymous messages from God about Earth and integral ecology! September brought us the experience of the passionate wisdom of the young teenager, Greta Thunberg, who spoke to world leaders about climate action. She said, “The eyes of all future generations are upon you. And if you choose to fail us, I say: We will never forgive you.” During October, we lived the *Synod on Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, the first official Church event with a focus on integral ecology. In the preparatory document for this Synod, it is written, “Wise elders promote the harmony of people among themselves and with the cosmos. Indigenous peoples ‘are a living memory of the mission that God has entrusted to us all: the protection of our common home’.”

We are aware that God speaks to us through scripture and creation, we trust that Earth holds us in her warm and merciful embrace, and we are challenged by the old man Francis and the teenage girl Greta. Now, let us listen to the voices of artists, theologians, ministers, global thinkers and aboriginal leaders as they give us new signposts to guide us along this energizing journey – a journey into new thinking, new language, new images, new theology and new passion in our care for our common home.