

Becoming Present to Creation:

Walking with St Francis in the Grounds of Holy Family College

The task

You are stepping out to encounter creation.

You are exploring the intricate and intimate connection between yourself, nature, and God.

You are preparing for prayer.

The means

You have St Francis' 'Canticle of the Creatures', a mosaic panel that shows St Francis with birds, the grounds of Holy Family in which to encounter creation. There are even some prompts and questions for you in your programme. However, to encounter nature you need to bring yourself and your capacity for awareness: your body, your senses, your thoughts, your feelings. You can bring some knowledge, too – of nature, creatures (like birds), and ecology and its systems. You can bring your curiosity and wonder, as well as the patience and determination needed to stay with the task.

Guidelines

Meet your reflection group and in loose association move out into the school grounds.

Enjoy the greenery of grass, plants, and trees. Feel the sun and air on your skin. Be aware of the earth beneath your feet.

Be attentive to the interaction between your body and nature.

Observe your senses (and the organs that assist them: eyes, ears, skin), feelings and thoughts.

Move quietly, with a sense of reverence. Give each other in your group enough personal space before you gather to share.

Give other groups their space – be mindful not to crowd too much. Rather move into another green space, into the shade of another tree. Move onto another possibility if the one (like the one on water in relation to the fountain) has already got enough groups there.

There are four encounters for you to explore. Begin with one. See how you go. When you are ready start with another. If you find yourself doing only one, that's fine. Just go as deep as you can.

Give your first encounter 7-10 minutes. Stay with it – or move on to your next encounter. Use 25-30 minutes to explore 1, 2, or 3 encounters.

For the last 15 minutes move into a group circle. Share your thoughts. If you feel the need to talk about your experience with one or more encounters do that. If you feel drawn to exploring the mosaic panel of St Francis with the birds do that.

Close by praying 'The Canticle of the Creatures' together.

Encountering Sir Brother Sun

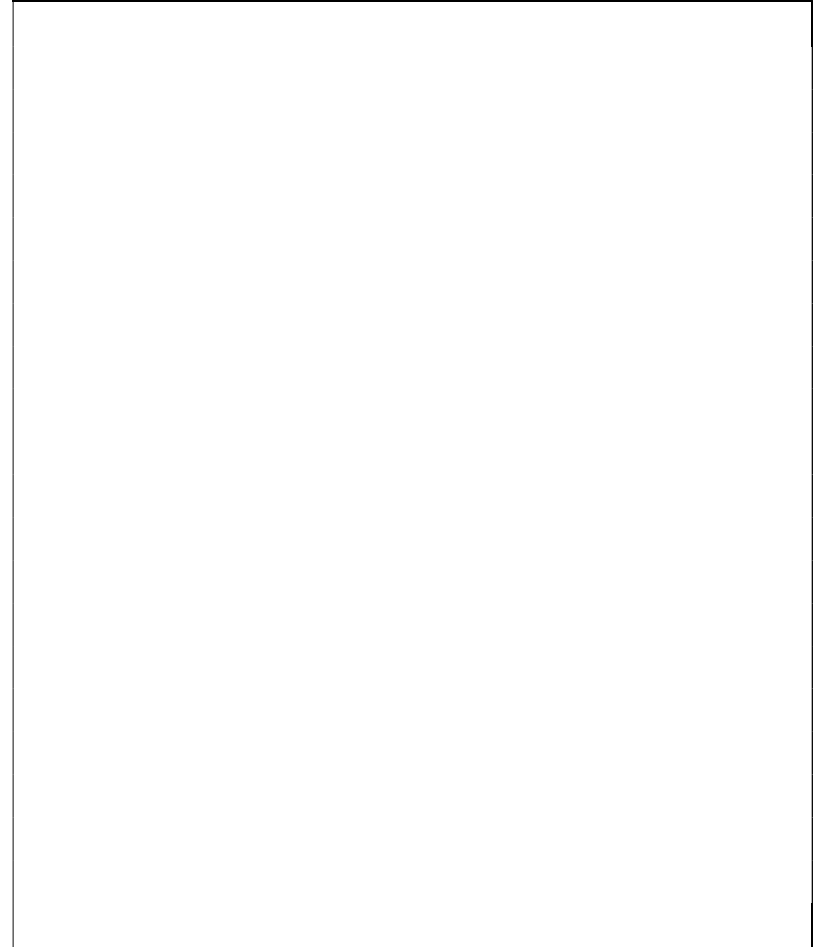
Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.

As you step out into the gardens of the school, how
does the sun feel on your skin?
How do your eyes respond to the shift from electric
indoor light to sunlight?

At the time St Francis composed this Canticle his eyes
were in almost constant pain, and his eyesight
compromised – perhaps even completely gone. And
yet he acknowledges Sir Brother Sun. What is the
condition of your eyes? Is your skin sensitive to sun?
What might you need to be careful of?

The sun provides earth with energy. All fossil fuels are
the long-ago products of plant life and the carbon
cycle. What kinds of energy cause a great deal of
damage to the environment? What kinds of energy
are safer and greener?

St Francis says that Sir Brother Sun ‘bears a likeness’
of God. What do you think he means by this?

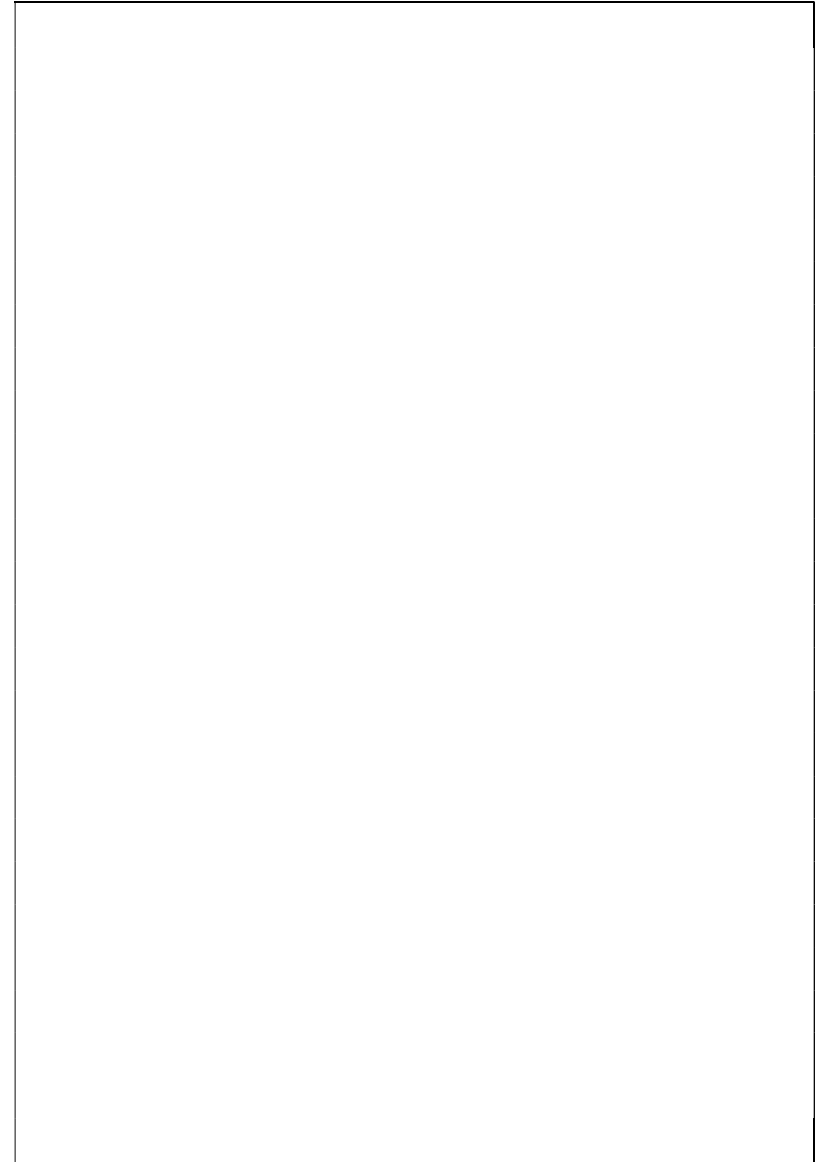


Encountering Brother Wind

Move into the shade.

Observe whatever movement of the air you are able to. What can you see of it? Can you hear of it? Where do you feel it? Stay with your sensed experience of air for a while. Then, describe your experience of air in these moments by writing it down.

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.



Encountering Sister Water

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble and precious and
chaste.

If you are able to make your way to the school fountain, you may be able to dip your fingers in the jets or pool. How does the water feel on your skin today? Listen to the sounds of the fountain. After a few moments, you may want to carry on listening and looking while you draw the fountain. What happens to you as you look, listen, and draw the fountain?

Sr Water is described as useful, humble, precious, and chaste. Write a sentence (or two) on each of these qualities as you understand them. Write down anything else that seems significant to you at this time.

Consider our dependence on sufficient, clean water. And consider our municipal and national challenges in providing sufficient, clean water to all people. And what it means to allocate water to agriculture, industry, commercial areas, or households.

What do you need to do to build a better relationship with Sister Water?

Encountering Sister Mother Earth

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother
Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers
and herbs.

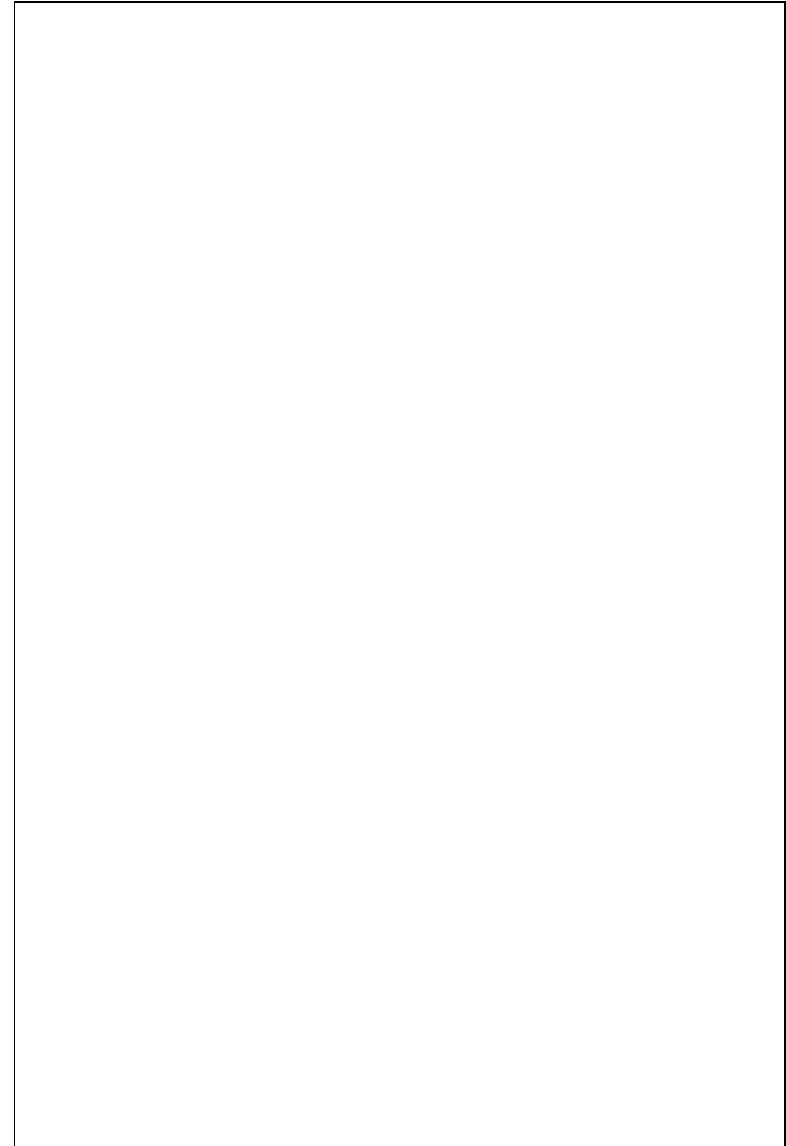
Notice the change of feel in your feet as you move
across different surfaces – such as paving and grass.
Consider taking your shoes off to bring your feet into
direct contact with these surfaces. Describe the
different feel of these surfaces.

St Francis is sometimes shown with bare feet, or as
wearing sandals.

If you think about your life, what can you say about
the road you are on?

If you think about your journey as a pilgrimage how
might you then describe the way you walk and the
destination you are moving towards?

What do you need to do to build a better relationship
with Sister Mother Earth?



Group Discussion: Learning from St Francis (Education by Models)

The tasks so far have mostly been done by you, the individual, in the vicinity of other members of your group. Now, come together as a group for this activity. You should have about 15 minutes to share your responses to the portrayal of St Francis below. Then, close by praying 'The Canticle of the Creatures' together.

Look at this mosaic panel of St Francis with the birds. What do you think the artist is trying to show us about St Francis? What do you think the artist is inviting us to learn from St Francis?



Further Encounters for Another Time

Sister Moon
Brother Fire
Sr Bodily Death

Actions you and your school can consider for 2026

Celebrate the Season of Creation (1/9 to 4/10)
Carry out small, local acts of care for the Earth, our common home.

Closing

Pray St Francis of Assisi's 'Canticle of the Creatures' together.

Canticle of the Creatures

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 of 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
chaste.

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 various fruit with colored 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.

