

## Coming Home to Mother Earth with the Good Shepherd

In recent years Sr Teresita Figueroa participated in a programme in ecological spirituality. She shares and her powerful story of new and renewed awareness

*“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety nine to search for the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy ...” (Luke 15:1-4)*

Speaking about the growing ecological movement, Thomas Berry said, ‘We are returning to our native place after a long absence, meeting once again with our kin in the earth community. For too long we have been away somewhere, entranced with our industrial world of wires and wheels, concrete and steel and our unending highways, where we race back and forth ...’

My experience of ecological conversion led me to a new meaning of being found by the Shepherd God. Indeed, it was a joyful coming home as I reconnected myself with the source of my being and found my rightful place in the whole community of life. Now I can truly call Mother Earth my mother, the one who has sustained and nourished me through the years.

I continue to discover God’s true identity and my personal call as I gain wisdom from nature, the primal revelation of God. With new eyes and a humble heart, I get to ‘see the sacred laws and wisdom in all life that surrounds us.’ It has given me a great sense of excitement to accept that there is a lot not just to learn and but also to unlearn.

I now claim to be a ‘student in the school of Earth Wisdom.’ Reinterpreting Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep, I see us humans as the lost sheep among the whole community of life. The ecological crisis and the state we are in despite our advances in knowledge and technology indicate that we have missed the mark. Failing to recognize our vulnerability, we have gone our own way, and alienated ourselves from the other members of the community of life. We have also turned away from our creator God. God has been searching for us. God even had to become human to make us see what we are called to image. As St. Paul said, in Jesus we see the image of the invisible God. By his life, Jesus taught us humans about our true identity and role. Interestingly, many of his parables made reference to nature indicating his deep earth connection

As I recalled my green story, I discovered the goodness of Mother Earth which I have taken for granted for many years. Even my vocation has its root in finding God in the garden. This realization made me feel so grateful, drawing out the desire to return her love. My rediscovering God in the garden as I come home to Mother Earth has strengthened my vocation. I have also discovered the answers to my questions about life.

I am a business graduate and have worked in the financial district of the country. I had been very uncomfortable with the principles of business which seemed contrary to the values of Christian life. The principle of 'serve, share and sell' struck a chord in my heart. I have been given much and it has been my desire to give much too without expecting anything in return.

As I experience Mother's Earth generosity and encounter the God of divine extravagance in nature, I realize that it is our nature to give, that in fact, the more we give, the more we receive: 'good measure, packed together, shaken down and overflowing.' (*Luke 6:38*) It is unfortunate, that this is not what is taught in the class-room. In school, I learned more about competition than compassion.

The new universe story deepens my sense of worth as I realize how long it took to prepare the earth for the arrival of the humans. The universe continues to grow. The latest discovery scientists have made is that there are 300 sextillion stars (300,000,000,000,000,000,000). I never before imagined such a huge number. It simply is so mind boggling, so overwhelming, so beyond my capacity to count. But that is precisely what God is, someone so beyond our knowledge and understanding. Perhaps it is this mysterious quality of creation that instinctively draws us to God during moments of encounter with nature.

We humans have looked at Mother Earth primarily in terms of what we can get from her. We have pillaged her resources and destroyed the balance of nature in the process. Ironically, in the midst of this human conquest, so many experience boredom and depression. We do need a new story that will enable us to find meaning in life and direct our choices. Indeed, the ecological crisis is a spiritual crisis. We need to rediscover the reality that we are not the masters of the earth but just one of the members in the community of life. Coming home on the shoulder of the Shepherd would mean seeing the web of life as a system of connections where everything is interrelated, interconnected and inter-dependent.

'Our heritage is also a task.' My deep affinity to Mother Earth finds its roots in my family history. I come from a family of farmers although education had alienated me from their closeness to Mother Earth. I see my having a green thumb as part of the legacy of my ancestors who worked with the earth. This gift I now put to good use. I have found joy from a deep connection with Mother Earth which I renew each day as I touch the soil and nurture the plants. I now see 'waste' with new eyes knowing these turn into rich soil after decomposing. I marvel at the transformations I see in nature and sense the presence of the God who makes the plant grow and the flowers bloom.

I feel blessed to be called to the Great Work. With the rest of humankind who are experiencing this great awakening, I wish to become part of the undertaking 'to carry out the transition from the period of human devastation of the planet to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually enhancing manner'. (*Thomas Berry*).