

# Heartbeats

## The Company of St. Angela in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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*For those of us who live in the northern hemisphere, the arrival of autumn with its change of seasons is a reminder to us of how much the gift of creation nurtures our contemplative spirits. As we continue to explore how Angela Merici's contemplative spirit lives in us who share her charism, this issue of Heartbeats blesses us with reflections on personal experiences of nature's gifts and its call to oneness with all of creation. We are grateful to those who were willing to share!*

I received my appreciation and love of nature from my father who brought it with him when he came to this country from his native Ireland. I absorbed it as I watched him take care of the flowers in his garden, and as I joined him in walks through the Bronx Botanical Gardens and along a local beach. Many years later, I learned theological language for what he had taught me. According to the principle of sacramentality, all of creation has the potential for disclosing something of God and God's work. Bodies of water have always been places where I have encountered God's Spirit. When I worked in Washington, D.C. and lived in Maryland, I went to a local lake to walk and pray and read poetry. Over the years, the lake became my sanctuary and the source of many gifts. There were the trees of various kinds, the daffodils, the mountain laurel and honeysuckle. There were the ducks gliding on the water, the Canadian geese lining up each evening and taking off in formation, the belted kingfisher and red winged blackbirds, along with the robins. Then there was the water itself with its different moods. When I sat on a bench at one part of the lake, I could imagine it was a river, the river of the water of life in Rev. 22:1. Finally, there was a great blue heron which made an appearance every once in a while. It was a majestic creature and, like the coming of God, it was always a gift, a surprise. It was a sacrament for me.

(Margaret Mary Kelleher, OSU, New Rochelle, New York)

Nature is a balm, permeating and penetrating, soothing and revitalizing, re-greening the parched dry spaces of the land that is me. Nature is pure gift waiting to be received by anyone regardless of belief system, nationality, skin color, gender. Nature immersion quiets my thinking and opens me to mystery. Nature calls me to respect others and live in solidarity with them.

Magnificent trees gloriously proclaim LIFE whole and holy. They speak of rootedness and steadfastness, of sheltering and providing, of releasing and letting go.

Twittering and chirping birds announce each new day as total gift to be embraced and lived with gratitude, faith, and courage.

We are called to be attentive for Spirit whisperings and to live expectantly in our unfolding universe. Let us treasure life, walk gently, be grateful, nourish peace.

(Paula Hartwig, OSU, Alton, IL)



Nature naturally moves toward neutrality. Water naturally levels; imbalances of charges within storm clouds discharge to find a neutral state. We all too often find ourselves in a state of IMBALANCE: our spiritual life, our professional and personal demands and priorities. Angela reminds us of God's call and promise of Peace. Like Angela, I find my peace in Nature: back-packing, hiking from valleys to mountain tops, from streams to glacial lakes. I need to remove myself from my human-made mayhem and walk among God's gift of beauty and wonder, to find a 'still-point,' "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10). For me, hiking is my way of grounding myself, just as lightning is Nature's way of discharging imbalances of charges in a storm. For others, it may be sinking our hands into the soil gardening, or swimming, kayaking or boating on water. Angela reminds us to be humbled before our God and bathed in God's peace and love! I can't help but be humbled when I stand small on a mountain peak. Songs of praise leap in my heart as I experience the vastness of God's creation. When I return home, I am once again "grounded" in Christ's peace and promise.

(Mary Somerfeld, Great Falls, MT)



There is something healing, restoring, centering about being in the midst of creation. For me, it's best to be outside, not inside looking out, finding some quiet place and noticing what beauty is present. It can be a bit overwhelming because there is so much stimulation for the senses. I allow myself to be captivated by some particular aspect – a bee, a cloud, birdsong, fragrant flowers – and pretty soon I am immersed in awe, wonder, calm, and sometimes humor.

Gradually I have begun to see myself not as outside looking/listening to the other, but as inescapably one with all that I experience around me. The Holy One is also not other than this, but is present, revealed, expressed through creation in this ongoing, unfolding story of which I am a part. Experiencing the Sacred as a part of who I am, enfolding me in the great flow, trusting that I am held there – not by my own doing – frees me to pray as/ from/ with/ in the Great Heart. The greater my awareness, the more the Holy One can touch the world with compassion, love and mercy.

(Mary Lapping, OSU, St. Louis, MO)



What stands out still about my childhood summers camped at the beach in Southern California, is how my Dad and I swam out beyond the breakers and floated on our backs. We floated there for hours...carried by the gentle movement of the rising and falling of the sea, floating in the silence of the deep, held by vast ocean but safe in that rhythmic embrace of the sea.

I think that was my first experience of contemplative prayer... being held by God...that all-surrounding loving embrace of our Creator God. And yes, creation still speaks to me often and everywhere of God's loving presence. One day this summer I walked out of my house with my dog Lacey and heard this eerie screaming sound and saw our resident wild fox. Following her gaze, I saw the reason. Across the parking lot her kit stood alone and still, waiting for a sign from mama fox that it was safe to move. Yes, God is that protective mama watching out for each of us. God's loving presence embraces us in a myriad of ways!

(Dianne Baumunk, Santa Rosa, CA)



*What ponderings do these reflections stir in you?*  
*How does the gift of creation nurture your own contemplative spirit?*  
*How do you experience a oneness with creation?*