

## **Sacred Heart Novena** *Gardiner Street (4)*

A heart for nature

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### **Introduction**

A warm welcome to everyone to our few evenings together: "Is your heart in the right place?" Last night our theme was a prayerful heart and this evening it is having a heart for nature.

One of the effects of the lockdown has been a slowdown in the rate at which we live our lives. Gardens, in particular, have been a great source of solace. Where I live, we have no garden but Thomas St is only 2km from the Phoenix Park. Almost every single day for the last 3 months, the Phoenix Park has been my way of coping and I've grown to love it. It is a quarter of a year since the lockdown started, which means, I've been present while spring unfurled itself into summer – a real privilege and a gift.

### **Topic**

St Paul writes in the letter to the Romans: For since the creation of the world God's invisible attributes—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through what has been made. (Romans 1:20)

### **Arguments**

**1.** The southern part of the Holy Land is really a desert called the Negev. Some years ago I had the chance to travel through the Negev, camping in different places every night. At one point, the whole group settled down for the night in a valley sloping east. It was one of those miraculously clear desert nights: the stars were brighter, there were more of them, they even felt nearer. I wanted to stretch out my hand and pull one down. It was a spectacular glimpse of the cosmos I spoke about the first night: 13.77 billion years old, all expanding from the big bang in the first  $10^{-43}$  seconds. In that setting, you could feel you were just a speck, nothing in the grand scheme. And yet, there was such a sense of presence: I had throughout the feeling of being held by the great creator, our father and our mother. It was a moment of epiphany, never to be forgotten.

**2.** St Paul is not the only one to see God in all that is. In the book of Sirach, there is a quite wonderful poem about creation, in chapter 43. It starts off with the sun, the moon and the stars – which it calls marvellous instruments of God. The poem is full of praise of the creator – quite ecstatic. Towards the end, words fail even this gifted writer, who concludes as follows:

We could say more but could never say enough;  
let the final word be: "He is the all." (Sirach 43:27)

The writer risks sounding pantheist.

This is very same intuition we find in Acts 17, when Paul is addressing famous philosophers:

From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' (Acts 17:26-28)

Everyone, believer or not, feels the sense of wonder and even gift. David Attenborough is a good example. Believers go a step further and have the courage to name the giver behind and within the gift: God, the creator of all.

**3.** The believer also recognises that every gift brings with it a call from God. As usual in the Bible, gift and response go together. In these days we've been marking the fifth anniversary of what may turn out to be Pope Francis' most significant intervention, *Laudato Si'*. There is no doubt that care of planet earth, our little spaceship, is the single greatest moral issue of our time. We are called upon to make it safe not only for ourselves but for all the generations after us – a safe world for our children's children and their children in turn. This is where faith gets very real: faith and science, faith and power, faith and money, faith and politics, faith and ethics, even faith and stark practical choices we all have to make now, today.

In the absence of travel and industry, nature has had a sort of sabbatical, a breather, a chance to rest and reset. It is not enough to be delighted or cheered by nature; we have also the duty to protect nature from destruction brought about by human intervention. Perhaps now, we have a chance to take stock and not simply go back to the way things were.

As we feel the beauty of the natural world, God's great gift to us all, we are called to action. It all depends on what you let yourself see. There's a short verse by Elizabeth Barrett Browning which goes like this:

Earth's crammed with heaven,  
and every common bush afire with God,  
but only he who sees takes off his shoes;  
the rest sit around and pluck blackberries.

### **Conclusion**

In this lockdown time, many of us have become happily reacquainted with nature. As we thank God for the way it helps us to cope, let us make our own the prayer of Pope Francis,

God of love, show us our place in this world  
as channels of your love  
for all the creatures of this earth,  
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.  
Enlighten those who possess power and money  
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,  
that they may love the common good, advance the weak,  
and care for this world in which we live.  
The poor and the earth are crying out.  
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,  
help us to protect all life,  
to prepare for a better future,  
for the coming of your Kingdom  
of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you!  
Amen.