

A Plain Tale of Home: Reading the Book of Nature

Fr **Thomas Berry, CP, PhD** (1914 –2009) was a Passionist monk and scholar of the world's religions, He was drawn early on to respond to the growing ecological and climate crisis and proposed the need for a "New Story" of evolution. He believed that humanity, after generations spent despoiling the planet, is poised to play a new role in an interdependent Earth community of species, consisting of a "communion of subjects not a collection of objects". He wrote that "while we have more scientific knowledge of the universe than any people ever had, it is not the type of knowledge that leads to an intimate presence within a meaningful universe... We no longer read the book of the universe. We have extensive contact with the natural world through photographs and television presentations. But as Saint Augustine remarked long ago, a picture of food does not nourish us."

Fr Berry's own nourishing vision began when he was eleven years old...

"It was an early afternoon in late May when I first ...looked out over the scene. The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in a clear sky ... This early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the entire range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive. ... The more a person thinks of the infinite number of interrelated activities that take place here, the more mysterious it all becomes. The more meaning a person finds in the Maytime blooming of the lilies, the more awestruck a person might be in simply looking out over this little patch of woodland. [Here] the magnificence of life as celebration is manifested in a manner as profound and as impressive as any other place I have known in these past many years...