

## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

All creation came into being by means of God's creative word. St. John tells us that "not one thing came into being but through Him." Further, God sustains all things in existence, for in Him all creation "lives and moves and has its being." Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote that all the world is "charged with the grandeur of God."

To see creation as it truly is, we must learn to take a long, loving look at the real world about us, at all the simple beauty which we often overlook in our busy and crowded lives. Photography students have expressed for many years: "You opened our eyes to see things we've never seen before." I hope that I also opened their minds and their hearts to see the loving hand of God in all things. The Grand Canyon is an example of loveliness and space beyond imagination.

The inanimate world is filled with a natural silence that speaks eloquently of God. St. Ignatius gazing at the heavens at night was ecstatic in prayer. In our own way, we feel the enchantment of the sky, the mountains, the ocean, the quiet beauty of Yosemite in winter.

The animate world pulsates with God's beauty and majesty, from the great Redwood trees, or elephants, or even to the smallest bees or hummingbirds, the brilliant colors of a cool October day, and the almost infinite varieties of shapes and

forms and colors of flowers in our gardens.

Photography can easily lead to prayer. For Thomas Merton the camera was a contemplative instrument. He photographed some of the images of his contemplation while walking in nature. The camera was a catalyst for his prayer. I find it is the same for myself.

My heart skips a beat as I contemplate the beauty of both large and small objects in nature. Flowers, in particular, touch me in a way difficult to fully describe. I can best let them speak for themselves as I show some of them to you. They speak the language of the heart, a language instilled in them by our loving Creator. “Say it with flowers.” We humans formulated that statement. But God said it first. God created these lovely creatures to tell us how much He loves us.

I would like to take you on a journey of lovely images and prayer as we contemplate the loveliness God has given to or shared with us. I plan to offer some prayer reflections with the slides and some times of silence for your own reflections, to meditate or pray as the Spirit moves you.

A teacher gave this assignment to her students:

“Find an unnoticed flower around your home and study it. Note its petals – their shape and their color. Turn it over and look at its underside. As you do,

remember this is your flower. It might have died unappreciated had you not found it and admired it.”

The next day, after the students reported on their flowers, the teacher said:

“Each one of us is like your flower. We are unique. But we often go unappreciated because no one takes the time to notice our unique beauty. Each of us is a master piece of God. There won’t be another person like us – ever again.”

What is one special gift or unique talent with which God has blessed me?

Lord, open our eyes to see your hand at work in the splendor of creation, in the beauty of human life.

Touched by your hand our world is holy. Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us and come to appreciate your eternal loveliness.

St. Augustine tells us it is by design that God hid the last days from us, so we would be on the lookout for Him every day.

The flower speaks to us. “Look at me. I am the best version of myself. I am authentic. I radiate my simple beauty.” And the

flower concludes: "It is as close to becoming a prayer as my abilities will permit."

The flower speaks to us. "Here I am, a bit of loveliness. I lay my life at your service to make you happy and to remind you of our loving God."

One of my photography students wrote this poem:

Petals round  
Their red mouths,  
And exhale  
Breath,  
The scent  
Of sweet mystery.  
We inhale,  
And wonder  
At their beauty,  
Fragrant flowers

Ourselves,

We part

Our lips

And perfume

The world

With prayer.

I ponder your splendor and glory, and all your wonderful works. For they recall your ample goodness, joyfully sing your praise.

Our hearts have a God-shaped hole in them that only God can fill.

“Go break to the needy sweet charity’s bread

For giving is living,” the angel said.

But then we ask

“But must I give again & again?”

“Oh, no,” said the angel, “with yourself be true.

Just give until the Lord stops giving

To you!”

In the twilight of life, God will not judge us on our earthly possessions and human successes, but on how well we have loved. (St. John of the Cross)

Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost...to labor and not to ask for reward, except to know that I am doing your will. (St. Ignatius Loyola)

God's presence is not discerned at the time when it is upon us, but often afterwards when we look back. (John Henry Newman)

What seems to be God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom. (I Corinthians: 25)

I ponder your splendor and glory, and all your wonderful works. For they recall your ample goodness, joyfully sing your praise.

To everyone there openeth various ways. The high soul climbs the high way. And the low soul gropes the low, and in between, on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro. But to everyone there openeth a high way and a low, and everyone decideth which way their souls shall go. (John Oxenham)

I will praise you Lord with all my heart,  
I will recount all your wonders.

Nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred. (Teilhard de Chardin)

Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush is aflame with God. And only he who sees takes off his shoes. (E.B. Browning)

Happy are they who grieve not for what they have not, but give thanks for what they do have.

Sing a new song for the Lord! Sing it and bless God's name. Tell the whole world of the simplicity of God's glory.

Lord, how thy wonders are displayed,  
Where ever I turn my eyes:  
If I survey the ground I tread, or gaze upon the sky  
There's not a plant or flower below, but makes your glory known.

Here I am, a bit of loveliness. I lay my life at your service to make you happy, and to remind you of our Loving God.

Yours are the only hands which can do God's work. Yours are the only eyes through which God's compassion can shine forth on a troubled world. (St. Teresa of Avila)

What is humankind that you remember us, the human race that you care so much for us?

Some people complain that God puts thorns on roses; others give thanks that God put roses among thorns.

Troubles are often the means God uses to fashion people into something better than they are.

God is the only maker of all things near and far;  
He paints the wayside flower, he lights the evening star.

Under all the false, overloaded glittering masquerade, there is in every person a noble nature.

Bless the Lord, all you works of the Lord,  
Praise and exalt him above all forever.

There's not a plant or flower on this earth below,  
But makes Your glory known  
And all that borrows life from You,  
Is ever in your care  
And everywhere that we can be,  
You, God, are present there.

I cannot gauge my wealth by what I  
Have in the bank. The only valid gauge is  
An inventory of what I have in my heart.

Come and see all the great works that God has brought forth  
by his love.

Lord, you are praised by all earth's creatures each in its own way.

With all the splendor of heavenly worship, you still delight in such tokens of love as we on earth can offer.

All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Is death a leap into a void? Of course not. It is to throw yourself into the arms of God

Lord, you are praised by all earth's creatures each in its own way. With all the splendor of heavenly worship, you still delight in such tokens of love as we on earth can offer.

Now thank we all our God,  
    with hearts and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things has done,  
    in Whom this world rejoices.  
Who from our mother's arms  
    has blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love,  
    and still is ours today.

Let me walk in beauty  
And ever behold  
The red and purple sunset

O Lord, how beautiful creation is, the work which you did  
bless;  
What then must you be like, Lord.  
Eternal loveliness!