

Daniel's reflection for week-beginning 31st December - Loving the earth – God's living body

*St Francis reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.
[Laudato Si)*

This is a long way from the fearsome teaching of the past regarding 'the world, the flesh and the devil', a negative story that frightened us when we were children, a story about the fall-out from the Adam and Eve myth that many Catholics still believe. Pope Francis knows that the world is good, as God pronounces it in Genesis; it is not a punishment for an 'original sin' that never happened! (to be discussed more fully later.) Even at this time of serious darkness for Christian churches there are stirrings of a new light from deep within. Because we are born with God's own longing safely incarnate within us, we will forever seek that harmony and hope for which we were born. As the river flows and the bird flies, the human heart will always long for completion in love. Pope Francis knows this. It is why he acts, speaks and writes as he does. It is, for instance, why he sees creation as 'a beautiful mother'.

He knows that something invariably stirs in us when we stop to look around us with eyes of wonder, with what he often calls 'the contemplative gaze'. We begin to see more deeply into the beauty of 'ordinary' things – the speeding train through the sleeping fields, the flash of a wing from a hidden nest, the whistle of the wind through November trees, the way a cat looks at you. We see daily happenings and events – mornings, tears, hills, water, seasons, births, bodies, babies, death, growing – with a new light around them, a forgotten vision now being recovered, some kind of promise of heaven restored. How utterly liberating it is for us to have a leader who encourages us to see this wonderful world as we would a lover, full of grace and blessing! Somewhere in our hearts we have always known and delighted in this vision in a natural, instinctual kind of way. And now we know, that hunch, that stirring, that lifting of the human spirit is another name for God's presence, for the deepest reason for our reaching, for the joy we never tire of seeking. The heaven we live for is not a place waiting in the future; it lies at our feet, at our fingertips, in what our eyes see and our tongue tastes.