

## **One**

### **The Enjoyment of Nature**

God made the natural world for us, to be our home, to be our source of material, and physical sustenance. But nature is also one of the great ways of refreshing our spirits, of renewing our joy and our energy and our happiness.

How can this be? How can looking at trees, sunsets, and oceans make us happy? How can looking at lifeless things enhance our own life?

The answer is that these lifeless, unintelligent things express the life and the mind of God the Creator. And the truth that we see in these beautiful symbols of His goodness produce three great effects on the soul: Humility, magnanimity, and peace.

## **Two**

### **Humility**

We all get so focused on the little spheres of our lives. We get so myopic on the issues we're dealing with in our own families, or our jobs, or our social networks. We lose perspective so easily and so quickly. We blow everything out of proportion. We make mountains out of molehills. We can't see the forest for the trees.

Well, one of the best remedies for this tendency to lose perspective, to lose the big picture, is to go back into nature. The antidote for turning molehills into mountains is to go to an actual mountain. The antidote for not being able to see the forest for the trees is to go walk in an actual forest.

Why? Because the bigness of the natural world, the sheer size and grandeur of nature, makes you remember how big the world is, and how small your own problems and ambitions really are.

We have a tendency to reduce the whole world to our own petty concerns. And when you go back to nature, you remember that everything you've been freaking out about isn't actually that big a deal. That there's a lot more to life, a lot more to God's world, than the zone of your worry.

In other words, nature offers you the gift of humility, which is the gift of not making such a big deal of yourself and your concerns. And that pleasure, the pleasure of being humble, that is a wonderful pleasure.

## **Three**

### **Magnanimity**

Nature does a great job of making us feel small but it also does a great job of making us feel great. In other words, nature inspires us to magnanimity, the virtue where we resolve to do really important things with our lives.

In the words of the great Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain, nature "stirs in us, obscurely, vague and indeterminate heroic potentialities... Hence an impression both of awe and challenge..."

How can this be? How can the same thing, a mountain, the ocean, a sunset, how can the same thing make us feel small and also make us resolve to be great? Because nature, for all its greatness and all its beauty, reminds us that we are even greater than it.

Nature has been made magnificent by God. Nature has been made glorious by God. But the human person has been made even more magnificently by God, and we have been destined for even greater glory with God.

Because we have the light of intelligence and the fire of love and the sudden swift impulse of creativity, so we are more like God than the sun itself. We have a vastness that exceeds the ocean. We have a stranger beauty than the most strange and lovely birds or beasts or fish. When we see nature, its greatness reminds us of our greatness.

And we stand straighter, and we remember that we are not the slaves of money, or peer pressure, or status, or economic or political forces. We remember that our weaknesses and our vices and our sins are not the sum and substance of what we are. We remember what we are and who we are. We are free sons and daughters of God.

And when we see nature, and remember our own greatness, we resolve not to be timid and lazy and discouraged and thoughtless. We resolve that we will live better. That we will continue to be the glory of God, which is man fully alive.

When we behold nature, we are more likely to say, “Yes, that’s right. Thank you, God. I will try to live more nobly, and more truly. For I am fearfully and wonderfully made.”

## **Four**

### **Peace and trust**

When Our Lord told us to consider nature, it was in order to keep us from worrying.

He said to consider the lilies of the field, to see how beautiful they were and how well taken care of. And He reminded us that the same God who takes care of them takes care of us. He said to consider the sparrows, to see how well they were fed. And He reminded us that the same God who takes care of them takes care of us.

The Psalmists were often remarking on how perfectly God takes care of the natural world, how He gives every creature its food in due season. When Job was confused and suffering and wondering what on earth was going on in his life, God responded by showing him how the whole of nature had been organized and provided for by Him.

And will God plan out the entire universe, every aspect of the natural world, and forget to arrange for our lives?

Nature doesn't depend on you. It depends on God. That's what makes it so good, so beautiful. And the truth is, you don't depend on you. You depend on God. And your life pattern, whether you can see it now or not, is a beautiful pattern that enriches the story of creation.

So look at nature, look at the moon and the stars and the leaves changing and the snow falling and the sun rising and the sun setting, look at it and know that the same God who supervises all of it is also taking care of you. Be at peace.

## **Five**

### **Spend time in nature**

You will not get a single one of these spiritual benefits from nature – humility, magnanimity, peace – unless you are willing to spend time in nature.

Near your house, go for walks, go for bike rides. If you have a nice backyard or if there's a public garden nearby, take a seat and have a long, slow, warm drink. Drive to places of natural beauty and leave your phone in the car. Go to a beach, go to a lake, go for a hike in the woods.

Most importantly, when you are in these places of natural beauty, pray to the Lord. Think of Him. Talk to Him. Listen to Him in the natural silence. And ask for humility, magnanimity, and peace. Pray for the strength and the will to fulfill your design as wonderfully as these beauties of nature fulfill theirs. And the God who made them and you will make it happen.