

The Grace of Forests

God Revealing, God Inspiring, God Challenging.

Introduction

Lent is a time of turning back to God. We lament the death of part of God's creation, the rainforests, and our part in this. This six part resource is for use in conjunction with the *Stations of the Forests* dvd and booklet.



For Faith Groups &
Senior students

www.columban.org.au

The forests sing God's praises.

"Let the trees sing out for joy" Psalm 96



James Gaither

Just as the forests are central to the lives of indigenous peoples in the Philippines, so too we are invited to become more connected by looking closely at six types of Australian forests. We will find the gifts of God displayed there and find out more about ourselves in the process. "There is a covenant between human beings and the environment", said Pope Benedict XVI during his World Day of Peace Message 2008.

"It is imperative that mankind renew and strengthen that covenant between humans and the environment."

The science of evolution has increased our knowledge of how Australian forests have developed – acacia, eucalypt, casuarina, melaleuca, mangrove, rainforest. Each is unique as it displays its character and each serves a special function in our natural environment.

"Theology, philosophy, and science all speak of a harmonious universe, of a "cosmos" endowed with its own integrity, its own internal, dynamic balance.

*"This order must be respected." John Paul II
Peace with God, Peace with All Creation, 1990*

Forests are in our genetic make-up.

*"Our remote ancestors were creatures of the forest. Our spirit is tuned to its sounds, its sights, its scents." The Garden God Walked In:
John Feehan, 2011*

Mystics know this and seek out forest places as 'the book of nature'. Our reflection on Australian forests will assist us in creating awareness of our intrinsic connection to the rest of creation.

*"The book of nature is one and indivisible"
Benedict XVI Caritas in Veritate #15*

Becoming more aware of the different colours, shapes, special make-up of each forest type and the creatures



Bob Padula

which live in them will teach us to be more aware of interdependence and relationships. Just as these are important for the forests to thrive, so are they if our lives are to be fully human.

You are invited over the six weeks of Lent to study these six Australian forest types more closely and to pray about what each means for your personal life and that of our community. You are invited to let yourselves be inspired to love their diversity and be challenged to care for all that depend on them, including us.

When we refer to the dvd *Stations of the Forests* about the experience of our fellow Filipinos and then add what we learn about Australian forests our eyes will be opened. We will be filled with gratitude for the graces of forests. We will praise God in our awe.

We will be with Jesus on the cross when we see the suffering that the abuse of forests causes.

It is suggested that the *Stations of the Forests* dvd be viewed **before** using *The Grace of Forests*. Both resources can then be used according to your needs.



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The Grace of Acacia Forests

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Week 1

"Immediately afterwards the Spirit drove him out into the wilderness" Mk 1: 12a



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Wikipedia

"...so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it." Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* #138, #139

God Revealing.....

Reflection

Acacia forests reveal God given life as a community of communities — a blessing of plants, animals, insects, reptiles and birds living together.

What did Jesus find in the wilderness? Have you been in the wilderness? What did you find?

Make a list of the nature parks and forests in your area. Who is responsible for them?

Describe the community of life you see in the *Stations of the Forests* dvd.

Getting to know acacia

Acacias, known as wattles because their branches were used by early British settlers to build "wattle and daub" huts, are Australia's largest genus of flowering plants. They are great survivors, using water efficiently.

One species, mulga, is a good fodder tree, sustaining sheep and cattle in drought times. The multi-coloured mulga parrot lives in its branches. Sweet "bush lollies" can be sucked straight from the plant.

Have you tried wattle seed ice - cream?

God Inspiring.....

Because of their wide distribution, acacia forests are important for the relationship between all the life forms found there. Their mutual dependence weaves a complex web.

Describe a forest in your area. Describe the community of life it houses and supports as one whole.

Meditation

Imagine you have an acacia seed in your hand. Meditate on the growth of that seed into a fully mature tree. Visualise the tree's struggle for life in the often dry soil. Make up a litany in praise of God's gifts revealed in acacia forests.

God Challenging.....

Acacias and we are interconnected parts of God's one creation. As the conscious part of creation God wants to turn our appreciation of acacia forests into care for their future.

Is there a Landcare, Bushcare or Dunecare group in your area.

Why do its members get involved?

"...creation ...is almost like another sacred book whose letters are represented by the multitude of creatures present in the universe."

Pope John Paul II, General Audience Jan 30 2002



FPA Western Australia

"My Mother's land can be dry and harsh. Yet every tree, every cluster of rocks, mountain, waterhole, river, cave is sacred."

Maisie Cavanagh (in Catholic Social Justice Series No 37, ACSJC, 2000)



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The Grace of Eucalypt Forests

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Week 2

"Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone by themselves" Mk 9: 2-10



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The great Red Gums in the creek-beds of the Flinders fill me with wonder; their feeling of strength of limb, of vigour and life, suggest the very spirit of endurance Hans Heyson, artist, 1926



Adrian Tritschler

"The gum tree stands by the spring. I peel its splitting bark And found a written track Of a life I could not read." From "Scribbly Gum". by Judith Wright

God Revealing.....

Reflection

The story of God's creation is long and ancient. Some of it is told in the Eucalypt forests found in Australia's Great Dividing Range.

Why do you think people like to go walking in these places?

Pray in gratitude for the gifts of solitude and forest life

Getting to know Eucalypts

They evolved from rainforest ancestors, adapting to a more arid environment with poor soils. There are about 700 different species unique to Australia. They are important for the conservation of Australia's biodiversity and help protect soil and water in catchments, including the Murray-Darling Basin.

Mountain Ash, which can live for 350 years and grow to 100 metres is the world's tallest flowering plant. A new study found they are the best trees in the world at locking up carbon.

Gather a variety of gumnuts and eucalypt leaves and look at them under a microscope or a hand-held lens. What do you find?



Mountain Ash

"This invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity." Laudato Si' #240

God Inspiring.....

Meditation

Ancient Gumbtrees

Lord, your ancient, noble red gums scattered across the grasslands.

Of southern plains and valleys, never fail to move me, Awakening a mood of admiration, awe, and meditation. Their weathered, warped limbs, gnarled and distorted. Like the arthritic limbs, hands and fingers, of one most dear to me, Insist on reaching out and up in some defiant ballet of divine celebration.

Immense trunks, bent in a long-past sapling youth by prevailing winds, and scarred from storms which centuries ago tore out limbs, invite me to touch and gently feel the texture, or rest my cheek in love.

Fed by massive, mis-shapen roots which before my life began, had already explored the ground of their being and found it sufficient.

These old folk, Lord, of your other kingdom, share with me the secret of grace. B Prewer (in Year of the Outback)

Compare the feelings expressed here with those of the Subanen peoples in Mindanao.

Find out the difference between old growth forests and plantations.

God Challenging.....

God is revealed in our old growth forests...in the evolution of life over long periods.

What do we need to do to meet our short term needs for paper, housing and energy without compromising our need to preserve the ancient heritage of our eucalypt forests?



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The Grace of Casuarina Forests

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Week 3

"Take all this out of here and stop turning my Father's house into a market."

Jn 2: 13-25



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The Islander

"Whichever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule." Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #56

God Revealing.....

Reflection

A forest is like a house of many rooms. Each tree is a home for diverse species, including numerous micro-organisms. Each species is a *"unique realisation of living possibility, each one an aspect of the realisation of God"*, says biologist John Feehan. Yet we have turned God's palatial home into a market place, using forests as commodities.

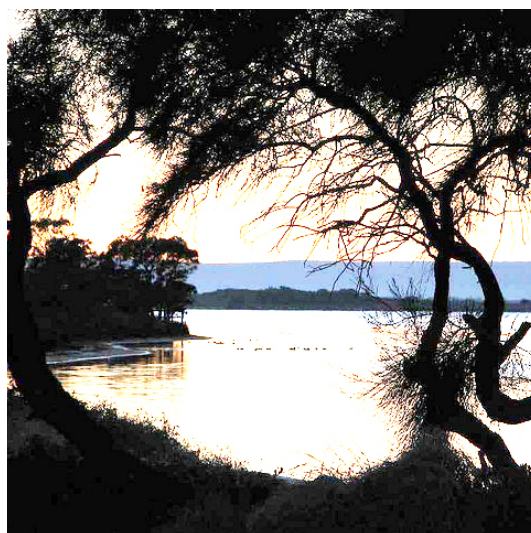
**Reflect on one native tree you know.
List all the creatures it is home to,
including the tiny ones.**

Getting to know Casuarina

Called she-oaks because their timber resembles European oaks, they are found in all Australian states, mostly along coastal and riverine areas. The name comes from the Malay word for cassowary because their drooping branches look like cassowary feathers.

The wood is used in flooring, cabinetmaking, poles and mulch. The glossy black cockatoo, endangered in some areas, depends on its fruit.

**Locate the casuarinas nearest to you.
Find out how they are helping the local ecosystems.**



Dave Clarke

God Inspiring.....

Meditation

Making a home and a world

A drop and an ocean
A seedling and a forest
A breath and an atmosphere
When we care for any part of creation
We are caring for the whole of creation.....

We enhance love's flow
Through the earth of the everyday
That makes our world a home.

Noel Davis "Love Finds a Way"- Shekinah Centre

**How can we feel for those people
whose home is the forests?**

**How are the Subanens "at home" in
their forest in Mindanao?**

The flowers will unveil the hidden secrets of their beauty; the stones reveal their crystalline structure, and the tiniest insect display wonders of mechanism... All new, all varied, all instructive, and all tending to raise the mind to higher and higher and nobler conceptions of what creation does to declare the glory of its author."

Julian Tenison Woods

God Challenging.....

There is more to forests than their economic value. What do you value about forests?

**Discuss the quotes on this page.
Compare and contrast the views expressed. What challenges you?**

A Canadian public-sector pension fund has joined a forestry management firm in a \$415 million acquisition of (Australian) timber lands..."The lands offer long-term opportunities to make money in numerous ways: says Leo de Bever, Aimco's chief executive.



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The Grace of Melaleuca Forests

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Week 4

"For God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through Him the world might be saved." Jn 3:14-21



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"When we destroy forms of this planet.... We destroy modes of divine presence" Fr Thomas Berry



Australian Geographic

"The recognition that the world is God's loving gift... entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion." Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #220

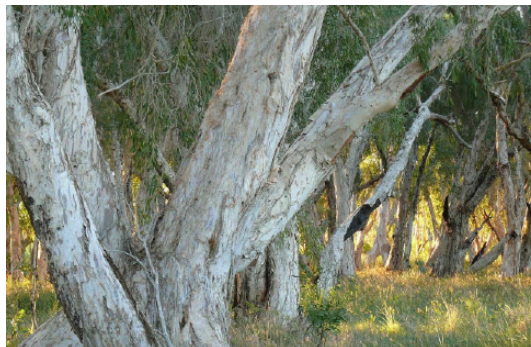
God Revealing.....

Reflection

In the eyes of God and from a scientific view, no species is insignificant or unworthy of our respect. The loss of forest leads to the extinction of some species.

Christ's grace extends to all life. Pray in sorrow for those creatures struggling to survive against thoughtless human activity.

The extinction of even one species is the loss of a unique mode of life's possibility.
John Feehan



Millstream Chichester National Park

Getting to know Melaleuca

Some are known as paperbarks because of their distinctive flaky bark. Melaleucas occur mainly around estuaries, streams and swamps in the coastal areas of the monsoonal north. They are vital for a whole variety of uses such as honey and tea tree oil.

Even small areas provide important habitat for a wide range of species, for example the vulnerable Southern Bell frog.

Threats are from clearing for agriculture and extraction for horticulture.

Do you know where your honey or tea tree oil comes from?

Find out more about the southern bell frog: www.conservationvolunteers.com.au

God Inspiring.....

Meditation

I am the forest

I am the forest an abundant source of life
I offer all who wish to share the wisdom of this land

For I am very old and have so much to tell
So come to me in silence

I'll reward you very well.

We are dependant on each other you are an integral part of me

All I ask is that you honour and respect all that you see

And when you honour my existence and claim it as your own

I'll be here always evolving part of the Masterplan.

Josene Corey, Far North Qld

Jesus is God enfleshed in the world.

What does this mean for how we relate to other species?

God Challenging.....

Role Play "My Life as a Forest" to explore the connectedness of every part of a forest ecosystem. Each person in a group represent one part
Eg. a human being, a reptile, a small shrub, a melaleuca, a waterhole, a microbe, a bee, a molecule of carbon.

Use wool to connect each part.

What does the forest look like? Feel like?

Describe scenarios that might happen. Eg. clearing. Act out the impacts on each part. Are these impacts similar to what is happening to the Subanens? How can the impacts be kept to a minimum?

Read "The Secret Life of Trees" by Peter Wohlleben.



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The Grace of Mangrove Forests

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Week 5

"I tell you most solemnly, unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest." Jn 12: 20-33



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Drew Douglas

If we want children to flourish, we need to give them time to connect with nature and love the Earth before we ask them to save it.
David Sobel

God Revealing.....

Reflection

Throughout nature we recognize God's way: from death comes new life. In the forests, new growth emerges from the fallen tree.

What new life emerges from a fallen tree?

What are some situations where the death of the forests leads to rejuvenation?

Is this the situation for the Subanens in Mindanao?

Getting to know Mangroves

Mangroves are found in coastal rivers, estuaries and bays. They have an important role as habitat and breeding grounds for marine and terrestrial life. They trap and recycle nutrient and chemical run-off. The seeds uniquely disperse into the water to be washed to new shores to lodge and grow.

Describe some regenerative processes of mangroves.

Who needs to look after mangroves?
See www.mangrovetree.org.au

God Inspiring.....

Meditation

"The earth is the most ancient mother. She is the endless source and the inescapable destiny."

John O'Donoghue, The Four Elements

What does this teach us about God?

Search on the internet using the words "poems on mangroves" and locate poetry created by children like this one from New Caledonia:

*"I protect the lagoons against the mountains
I protect the little ones against big predators
I protect the people against the angry waves...
Then the children must help me against the wrong-doer who pollutes me, poisons me, contaminates me and destroys me.
That makes me very sick."
www.peopleandplanet.net/?lid=27076&topic=55§ion=29*

Compare your feelings with theirs?
Discuss reasons for your feelings.

God Challenging.....

Scripture tells us we must become like children to come to God. Can we reconnect children to creation and their creator?

Can we:
Build their sense of wonder and awe?
Encourage their prayer about nature?
Encourage their unstructured play outside?

Get ideas from:
"Last Child in the Woods", by Richard Louv



*"In some coastal areas the disappearance of ecosystems sustained by man-grove swamps is a source of serious concern."
Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #39*



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The Grace of Rainforests

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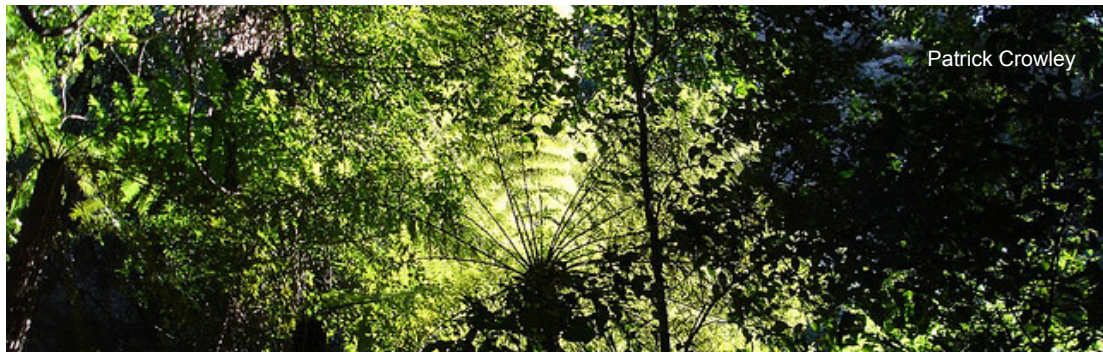
Week 6

"He will show you a large upper room furnished with couches, all prepared. Make the preparations for us there." Mk 14



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Patrick Crowley

God Revealing.....

Reflection

Just as a woodworker reveals the beauty of the grain in the timber she is working, so God is revealed to us in the depths of the forests. Just as the craftsman patiently works around the knotholes he finds, so God is forgiving of our flaws when we recognize our despoiling of creation and express our sorrow.

Rainforest timbers produce beautiful furniture. Do you know where your furniture comes from?

Has it come from rainforests overseas?

Has it come from our old growth forests?

Getting to know Rainforests

Rainforests contain remnants of Gondwanan forests where we find the origins of plant life.

They are only about 2% of our total forest area but contain enormous biodiversity. Australian rainforests have suffered from clearing for 200 years, including for furniture timber. Damage to them is long-term because they require a continuous canopy which allows flourishing understorey life and activity on the forest floor.

Find out where Australia's rainforests are. What do you notice about their location?

How might their location affect the impact of climate change on them?

God Inspiring.....

Meditation

Walking into a rainforest awakens the senses: the coolness, the filtered light, the moisture, the surprise of a colourful butterfly or an orchid high up in the branches, the twisting vines and the buttressed roots. It is a place of mystery that with open minds and hearts leads to wonder-filled discovery. It stirs the heart to pray.

How are rainforests protected now? Find out at the Australian Rainforest Conservation Society.

www.rainforest.org.au

"The ecosystems of tropical forests possess an enormously complex biodiversity which is almost impossible to appreciate fully." Pope Francis, Laudato Si' #38

God Challenging.....

Jesus grew up with Joseph, a carpenter, so he may have had a keen eye for good furniture!

Before you buy new furniture, find out how to check that it is not rainforest or old growth timber.

www.fscaustralia.org/get-involved/become-fsc-certified
www.thelaststand.org.au

"The spirit of God is a life that bestows life...root of the world-tree and wind in its boughs" Hildegard of Bingen, 11th century



Peter Nijenhuis

Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realize that human kind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations.

Sigmund Jähn, astronaut



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