

## Contemplative Exercise 1 - Beholding in Nature

**Introduction:** This exercise comes from St. Francis' idea that God permeates all of creation. Saint Francis believed that fellow creatures can praise God and teach us about seeking relationship with the divine. This contemplative exercise will give you a chance to build a deeper appreciation for God in the created world. You may even get to know a plant or animal in a way you do not expect!

**Time:** 30-45 minutes (although more time is always possible)

**Materials:** None required other than access to the outdoors. A journal and pen can be helpful if you'd like to record your experience.

### Method:

1. Find a place outdoors as free as possible from distractions.
2. Before you begin your walk, take about 1 minute to invite God to meet you. Imagine yourself breathing in the Holy Spirit with each breath, filling you.
3. Walk around in the outdoor place you are. Take note of trees, leaves, flowers, or other elements of nature that are easy to observe with your five senses and can be still for 20 minutes. Plants, rocks, or earth are often easiest. Pay attention to what objects capture your attention.
4. Return to one of the objects that caught your attention.
5. Get into a comfortable position, and spend 15-20 minutes just noticing it. Try not to analyze it (ie if it's a rock, try not to worry about what minerals are in it, if it's a flower, don't try to identify what type), but rather simply experience it.
  - a. Spend some time touching it. Notice what it feels like. Is it sharp? Rough? Is it heavy?
  - b. Smell it. Notice if the smell brings up any emotions or memories in you.
  - c. Look at it. Trace its edges with your eyes. Note its color(s), the different pieces that combine to form it.
  - d. Stare at it and let your eyes unfocus a little.  
*Each time your mind wanders, just gently return it to the object.*
6. After the 15-20 minutes have passed, engage the object in some way.
  - a. Tell the object what it's been like to spend time with it
  - b. Ask a question
  - c. Draw it, press it, or make a mark with it somewhere
  - d. Go back to one of the memories or sensations that came up and follow where it leads
7. Release the object and record your time with it however you'd like.
8. Say a quick prayer of thanks. *"God, thank you for the ways you reveal yourself through all creation, including through my brother/sister say what the object is. Blessed is your name."*