



SHORT GUIDE ON CONTEMPLATING WITH CREATION

Our commitment to ecological conversion invites all of us to be contemplative, to bring loving awareness and presence to each moment. It is simple, but not easy. Contemplation can be supported by these three elements.



1. **Awareness** that you are in the presence of God. Pause and bring awareness to what or who might be present in this moment. Remember how you want to bring loving awareness and presence to each moment

2. Bring awareness of the **body** by noticing the felt sensations whether our breath, whether in our bellies or the in-and-out of the heart, or our body as a whole. You might also attune to other senses, such as hearing, touch, smell, especially if you are in nature.

3. **Choose** how to respond in the moment with love. Contemplation can create space so we can make wise loving choices instead of reacting. If we are in a formal prayer period of meditation, at this step we might simply choose to rest in God's loving gaze, to gently be with the breath while opening to God's presence. When thoughts, emotions, sensations arise simply notice what is happening in your mind, and with great gentleness return to the breath or the body. It can be helpful to have a word or phrase that reminds you of your intention to rest in Christ such as "Let go" or "Abide" or "Jesus".



LSM GUIDE TO CONTEMPLATING WITH CREATION





What is contemplation?

Why contemplation at LSM?

What is contemplation with creation?

Why contemplation with creation?

What is the difference between contemplation and meditation?

How do I contemplate?

Contemplating with the body and breath

When do I contemplate?

Contemplation in formal meditation

Being contemplative at mass

Being contemplative in nature

Being contemplative in meetings

Being contemplative when shopping

Is contemplation a prayer or a practice?

What if my mind is too busy to contemplate?



WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION?



Contemplation is a way of being from the heart that enables us to receive and respond to God's love in each moment.

Pope Francis shares that "To contemplate is to grant oneself the time to be silent, to pray, to restore harmony to the soul, the healthy balance between head, heart and hands, between thought, feeling and action."

To contemplate is to encounter the present with awareness and love in order to live our ultimate calling, to praise and love God and one another.

WHY CONTEMPLATION AT LSM?

Contemplation is a way of being from the heart that enables us to receive and respond to God's love in each moment.

Pope Francis shares that "To contemplate is to grant oneself the time to be silent, to pray, to restore harmony to the soul, the healthy balance between head, heart and hands, between thought, feeling and action."

To contemplate is to encounter the present with awareness and love in order to live our ultimate calling, to praise and love God and one another. ²

¹https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2020/september/documents/papa-francesco_20200912_comunita-laudatosi.html



WHAT IS CONTEMPLATION WITH CREATION?



There is a rich tradition of contemplation within Christianity, from contemplation of the blessed sacrament in Eucharistic adoration, to contemplation of Scripture in the monastic practice of *lectio divina*, and contemplation of Jesus' life in the Ignatian spiritual exercises. At the heart of contemplation lies our ultimate desire of opening to receive God's love in silence and stillness.

At LSM, we focus on contemplation with creation, following the practice of Jesus who contemplated with and in creation. Jesus was "in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: 'Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest' (Jn 4:35). 'The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants' (Mt 13:31-32)" (LS 97).

We also recall that Jesus would withdraw to places in nature like the desert or the mountains to commune with his Father in solitude. Contemplation with creation is an invitation to pray outside in nature. It can also include contemplating the living beings within our homes, or even recalling natural places in our imagination to open to God's voice.

Contemplating with creation also includes contemplating ourselves as creation by bringing the breath and awareness of the body into our prayer. We do not want to forget that we too are made up of the elements of creation: earth, wind, fire, and water. "[W]e breathe [the earth's] air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters." (LS 2) Contemplating with our bodies also includes bringing in the bodily senses - sight, smell, hearing, touch, and maybe even taste. By bringing in our full selves, we can open to the "temple of the Holy Spirit" of our bodies.

² https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200916_udienza-generale.html



WHY CONTEMPLATION WITH CREATION?



In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis states that our current ecological crisis requires a change of attitude in our hearts. He connects our destruction of creation to our vast “interior deserts” that lead to frenetic activity, busyness, and overconsumption. Instead, he says, “Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle” (222).

Contemplation helps us to better hear creation’s song by opening us to gratitude and awe. Contemplation allows us to open to the cries of the earth and poor, by increasing our capacity to be with the suffering of others. Contemplation finally helps us to hear creation’s call to us to respond to the healing of our earth by quieting the mind to better discern what is ours to do.

Our lives are often so busy that God’s words to us are often buried or lost. Through contemplation our distracted minds can settle to better perceive the divine message that might be present before us.

In addition, contemplation can help us to cultivate ecological virtues of gratitude, repentance, interior peace, humility, sobriety, and care. For instance, we often are not aware of the impulses that drive our decisions which often lead us to purchase something unnecessary which is destructive to ourselves, others and our planet. Contemplation can create the space to make wise choices and refrain from overconsumption by not getting hijacked by our initial impulse.





WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONTEMPLATION AND MEDITATION?



Contemplation is an approach to life that can be brought into every moment of our lives, whether talking to others, praying in mass, or shopping. It can be helpful to think more about it as an encounter where one is bringing an attitude of loving awareness to the moment. Here at Laudato Si' Movement we understand meditation as a formal period of contemplation by setting aside a specific time in stillness and silence. This is an important practice to cultivate our contemplative muscle, while resting in God's gaze.

Consider it like gardening. As the spiritual writer Fr. Martin Laird writes, "a gardener does not actually grow plants. A gardener practices certain gardening skills that facilitate growth that is beyond the gardener's direct control." This is also the case for contemplation. It can be important to set aside time and energy in meditation to consciously hone this contemplative "muscle."

³ Martin Laird, *Into the Silent Land: The Practice of Contemplation* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2006), 3-4.



HOW DO I CONTEMPLATE?

Here are three elements that can support contemplation, whether one is in a formal period of contemplation in silent meditation or one is moving about in one's daily life.

1. Awareness: Pause to bring awareness to what is present in this moment, including God's loving gaze upon you. Remind yourself that you want to bring a contemplative attitude to whatever is before you.

2. Body: Bring awareness of the body by noticing the felt sensations of the breath, whether in our bellies or the in-and-out of the heart, or our body as a whole. You might also attune to our other senses, hearing, touch, smell, especially if you are in nature. Bringing awareness to the "temple of the Holy Spirit" can help us stay anchored in the present moment in order to be open to God's presence here and now.

3. Choice Contemplation is not simply a passive activity, but one in which we are to "stay awake" (1 Thess 5:6) of our intention, to receive and open to God. We can then choose how to respond to each moment with love. This might be the person before us, impulses that are arising, or our own interior thoughts or emotions. We often are not aware of the impulses that drive our decisions which can be harmful to ourselves, others, and our planet. Contemplation can help us to slow down and bring awareness to what is actually present and to act in love.



CONTEMPLATING WITH THE BODY AND BREATH

The foundation of our contemplation with creation is awareness of the body. We recall that the body is a “temple of the Holy Spirit.” (1 Cor 6:19) The gift of the body is that it is always with us. In addition, being present to the body, through awareness of the actual felt physical sensations brings us immediately into the present moment. This might include the senses, sight, smell, hearing, touch, and even taste. Bringing awareness to what we are perceiving in our actual experience brings us into the present moment.

For many of us, especially when engaged in formal meditation, we contemplate with the breath. Throughout Christianity, the breath has been seen as sacred: from God breathing life into Adam to the breath of the Holy Spirit that came upon the first apostles. We see the beginnings of breath meditation in the Desert Fathers and the Hesychast tradition. For those of us aimed at ecological conversion, meditation rooted in the breath reminds us of our interconnection with earth's elements, God's animating presence, and the sacredness of all life, including our own.



To contemplate with the breath, we simply bring our awareness to our physical experience of the inhalation and exhalation of our breath, wherever it is strongest. This might be at the nostrils, or in the rise and fall of the belly. You might also like to bring awareness of breathing in and out of the heart, as a way to deepen the connection to the heart space.

For some people, contemplating with the breath might be challenging. If this is the case you can focus on another part of your body like your hands, or you can focus your awareness on one of your senses, such as hearing.



WHEN DO I CONTEMPLATE?

Anytime! It can be helpful to recall that contemplation is more a way of being than a doing. We might focus more on being contemplative versus doing contemplation. Here are some examples of how we can bring the contemplative approach into different situations.



CONTEMPLATION IN FORMAL MEDITATION

The contemplative steps can be used as a formal practice of meditation to cultivate our contemplative muscle. We begin by setting aside a specific time to sit in stillness and silence. We close our eyes or keep a soft unfocused gaze. We then become aware of God's presence and our desire to rest in God's gaze. Next, we shift our attention to the body through the breath, noting the physical experience of the inhalations and exhalations. We can then choose again and again to notice our thoughts and emotions before returning to the sensations of breathing. We might gently say to ourselves "abide in God" or something similar while staying connected to the sense of breathing.



BEING CONTEMPLATIVE AT MASS



Contemplation can be helpful to gather the attention of the mind and heart in God during mass. As we enter the Church we can bring awareness to our desire to be fully present to God. When we make the sign of the cross, we can feel our fingers touch our forehead, heart, and shoulders opening our body to this time of prayer. Throughout mass as the mind gets distracted we can choose to focus on the body, such as when listening to the Word feeling the breath to stay in the present moment, when kneeling feeling the sense of reverence, or when receiving the Eucharist, experiencing the physical host being received into your body as this precious gift from Christ.

BEING CONTEMPLATIVE IN NATURE



In LSM's prayer book we share a way of contemplation by communing with creation. You walk or look around yourself slowly and bring awareness of when a member of creation attracts your attention. Allow yourself to linger, to pause and use your bodily senses to take in the wonder of this creature: the colors, shapes, smells, textures. Then choose how you want to be with this member of creation. Perhaps you want to enter into dialogue with this member of creation, calling to mind St. Francis talking to the birds and calling Brother Sun and Sister Moon. You might ask a question. Then listen. And before moving on find a way to offer love, by saying thanks to your new friend and to God.



BEING CONTEMPLATIVE IN MEETINGS

To begin, bring awareness that you are in the presence of the Holy Spirit and that we are here to listen deeply to the Holy Spirit. Acknowledge each person present, remembering that everyone, including yourself, are a beloved child of God in whom the Holy Spirit is present. Then invite a few moments to be in the body by connecting with the breath, as God's life breathing in you, and recalling that each of us are breathing the same air. Invite each person in the silence to choose how they want to be present in the encounter with openness and patience or whatever other quality of the heart they feel called to in the moment.



BEING CONTEMPLATIVE WHEN SHOPPING



We can bring awareness to the desire to buy something. We can then connect with the body through feeling the inhalation and exhalation of our breath. It can also be helpful to notice the physical sensation behind the consumer impulse. This movement from head to the body creates some to then choose how we want to respond to the impulse. Asking a question can be helpful in our decision "Do I really need this or just want it? "How might I hear the cry of the earth and the poor in this moment?" What is God's desire at this time?



IS CONTEMPLATION A PRAYER OR A PRACTICE?



Both! It is practice because it is a way of being that we can cultivate to increase our capacity for awareness, receptivity, and wise responses. Contemplation is also prayer. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, quoting St. John Damascene, "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God." (CCC 2559) Thus anytime you are offering your time of silent contemplative practice to God, recalling you are in God's loving gaze, it is prayer.

WHAT IF MY MIND IS TOO BUSY TO CONTEMPLATE?



This is completely natural. We can bring in three elements. We become aware of what types of thoughts are present, not getting caught in the content but just noting silently what is present. Or we might open to another aspect of the body, like listening, noticing when sounds arise or pass away. We might even see if there is a physical sensation connected to any predominant feeling or thought and be present to that sensation. Having noticed, we might choose to make space for the discomfort of our restlessness or anxiety, trusting that God will give us the grace to be with our experience with love.



QUOTES IN LAUDATO SI' RELATED TO CONTEMPLATION WITH CREATION





”

Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, and interminable and nerve-wracking distractions? (LS 225)

The continued acceleration of changes affecting humanity and the planet is coupled today with a more intensified pace of life and work which might be called “rapidification”. Although change is part of the working of complex systems, the speed with which human activity has developed contrasts with the naturally slow pace of biological evolution. (LS 18)

‘The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast’.^[152] For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. (LS 217)

“Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle.”(LS 222)

[C]ontemplative rest...protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. (LS 237)



”

This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since “for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice”.[\[57\]](#) (LS 85)

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence “must not be contrived but found, uncovered”. (LS 225)

We are called to develop the attitude of the heart “which approaches life with serene attentiveness, which is capable of being fully present to someone without thinking of what comes next, which accepts each moment as a gift from God to be lived to the full.” (LS 226)



”

The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder.

As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: “Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest” (Jn 4:35). “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants” (Mt 13:31-32). (LS 97)

Many people know that ...the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. (LS 209)



BODY



We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. (LS 2)

For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation. “Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world’s salvation”.^[165] (LS 235)





ECOLOGICAL VIRTUES



An awareness of the gravity of today's cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. (LS 209)

Gratitude: [Ecological conversion] entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works. (220)

Christian spirituality proposes ...a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. (LS 222)





”

Inner Peace: Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. (LS 225)

Humility: Once we lose our humility, and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong. (LS 224)

Simplicity: We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfillment. (LS 222)



”

[S]obriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those

who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer. (LS 223)

Care: Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. (LS 231)

This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works. (LS 220)



OTHER QUOTES FROM POPE FRANCIS

The best antidote against this misuse of our common home is contemplation. (Catechesis [Sept 16 2020](#))

“My wish for you is that you may nurture contemplation and compassion, indispensable ingredients of integral ecology.” (Audience to Laudato Si’ Communities [Sept 12, 2020](#))

“To contemplate is to grant oneself the time to be silent, to pray, to restore harmony to the soul, the healthy balance between head, heart and hands, between thought, feeling and action” (Audience to Laudato Si’ Communities [Sept 12, 2020](#))

“Without contemplation, it is easy to fall prey to an unbalanced and arrogant anthropocentrism, the “I” at the centre of everything, which overinflates our role as human beings, positioning us as absolute rulers of all other creatures.” (Catechesis [Sept 16 2020](#))

