

The Mysticism of Laudato Si' 22

GARDENS

Gardens offer endless scope for budding mystics! They are safe places, places of life, abounding in beauty. Where there is a garden, there will be water, and living things with their varied beauty. Charles Darwin, although remembered as the great proponent of evolution, saw himself primarily as a *beholder* of the natural world. He spent much of his life contemplating the simplest things, and he ends his great work, *The Origin of Species*, by noting: 'It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank...' This humble bank he studied is clothed with many plants, with birds singing, insects flitting about and worms crawling through the damp earth. It leads him to reflect that 'these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other and dependent on each other... have all been produced by laws acting around us.'

So, find your entangled bank, contemplate it, muse on its long history, and reflect on what it is trying to say to you. Let this be your holy place where you fall in love with the natural world and with its Maker. Let the tapestry of life come alive under your gaze. Perhaps you may exclaim, like Darwin, 'It has been for me a glorious day, like giving to a blind man eyes.'

The pope says: '*The biblical texts tell us to "till and keep" the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). "Tilling" refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while "keeping" means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving*' (67).

Gardens are important in Scripture, and in the bible they offer revelations for our ecologically-endangered times. Eden is described in all its beauty: God pulls out all the stops for humankind, and walks there in the cool of the evening, hoping to meet with Adam and Eve. This garden – *paradise* in Greek – is given into their care, but they soon mismanage it by plucking fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In this sense we might say that our 'original sin' is to spoil the handiwork of God in nature. But it is in a garden that Mary of Magdala met her risen Lord in the disguise of a gardener, and our ruptured relationship is radically

healed. The Lord still walks in our Earth Garden and wishes to encounter us there,
so out you go!