

FINDING GOD IN A LEAF?

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Why choose as a title for these reflections something so humble as a leaf? The answer is that leaves are plentiful, immediately accessible and also wonderful. They speak to us of God; they are a revelation of what God is like and how God works all around us. A single leaf, living or dead, will guide you surely into the mysticism of *Laudato Si'*. So what is a leaf? Leaves are usually thin and flat, with a complex vein system like a network of small canals: these provide for the leaf's tasks a supply of water from the ground. Leaves have pores which take in carbon dioxide, and they maximise their surface area to absorb sunlight as required. This promotes photosynthesis, a complex process which enables the leaf to manufacture nourishing food for the parent plant by a judicious mix of gas, water and light.

Leaves are small but well-organised living factories. Because they are vital to the world as we know it, they have elaborate strategies for dealing with pests and unfavourable seasonal conditions. Leaves look placid and work silently; they have a short life span, but when you meet dead leaves in autumn, salute them with gratitude for all they have achieved. Without them there would be little vegetation and the oxygen vital to life would disappear. And when leaves finally fall to the ground their remaining nutrients are recycled to provide for next year's growth. Nothing of them is wasted; all is given over. They give an instance of that universal self-donating love which, as Dante says, 'moves the sun and the other stars'.

Chat with a leaf!

Try engaging with an older leaf! The Pope says that 'nature cries out to us' so let's listen to that voice! The dialogue might run as follows: 'Good day! Please tell me your story'. 'Veil' says the leaf, 'that big tree beside us is my parent and it gave birth to me this spring. It's been a good life up there: I don't think I ever harmed anyone, and, with my 50,000 siblings I helped your species by absorbing CO₂ and providing oxygen. A little while back my parent had to withdraw support of me to conserve itself for winter. So here I am, cracked and crumbling.' 'And what next?' 'Well, like yourself I'll return to dust and become part of something else, a daffodil, perhaps! Receiving and giving back is the rhythm of things. We trees go back some 335 million years - a bit longer than humans, I may say! Someone of your species has said that trees are God's first temples. Not bad! Of course, we all go back to the beginning, so we're the same deep down ... But your species destroys so many of us, despite the fact that trees are the earth's lungs, and we could eat up enough CO₂ to save our common home. Can you do anything to help?'

I find that this way of relating to nature offsets my instinct to see material things simply as objects. Try it and enjoy!