

Column

“The earth is charged with the grandeur of God,” says poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. Yet, many of us do not take time to notice this grandeur. Caught up in the frenzy of life in the 21st century, we let it go past.

Not everyone neglects it, though. I know one woman who takes it in on her way to and from church and uses it for an occasion of giving thanks to God. I know because she often shares her experiences with me.

I must confess I often get preoccupied and don't see as much as I ought. Even so, this past week, the blinders came off and its splendour broke through. This epiphany happened as I walked from one building to another through St. Luke's Churchyard.

First several watermelon-red crape myrtles caught my eye. Then a few steps along the path I was met by the purple blossoms of althea bushes. Rounding the next corner, my eyes turned to the creamy flowers interspersed in the green leaves of the magnolias . . . Grandeur everywhere I turned!

There is, however, a danger that comes with being carried away by beauty in the natural world. It is possible to deify nature and so collapse into some sort of sentimental, sub-Christian pantheism.

The pantheism of which I speak wads God and the works of His hand into a single ball of wax . . . God is the sunset, God is the clouds, God is flowering trees. Such thinking is overly simplistic.

The right way round is to view the created thing – often incredibly beautiful – as a signpost pointing to the Creator. “All things bright and beautiful . . . the Lord God made them all,” says hymnwriter Cecil Frances Alexander.

These signposts are important but we need to go on to where they are pointing. They may give us a momentary tingle and intimations of the Transcendent, but something more is needed if we are really to know and experience God.

The good news is that “something more” has been supplied. God has revealed Himself in all his fullness in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. It through Him all the pieces of the puzzle go together and make sense.

C.S. Lewis takes this thought of Christ giving coherence to life and translates it into words when he says: “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”

Breathe in the beauty of the nature world – yes – but let Christ make that picture complete.

O HEAVENLY Father, who hast filled the world with beauty; Open, we beseech thee, our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him by whom all things were made, thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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