



La Vista Ecological Learning Center

A ministry of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate

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E-News and Eco-spirituality Calendar

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Monthly reflections are archived in the [Blog](#) on our web site.

April - Awakening to the Invisible



Recently I saw a promo on PBS for the documentary *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*. The description read, "The story of an idea as uniquely American as the Declaration of Independence and just as radical; that the most special places in the nation should be preserved, not for royalty or the rich, but for everyone". I looked forward to viewing them again...until.

I saw this promo soon after reading the article by Breanna Draxler in "YES!" magazine, "Justice at the Heart of Climate Activism". The article awakened me to the fact that I hadn't been thinking about the justice issues behind the creation of our national parks. Did I really believe these lands were void of people and care all those years, just waiting to be saved by preservationists for personal enjoyment and from exploitation for commercial gain?

In reality, according to Draxler, "...the establishment of these *untouched* wilderness areas was the product of colonization and genocide". She goes on to say, "Defining these *wilderness* areas as being *untrammelled by man* erases the millennia of Indigenous land management that shaped them". It seems that this series on the parks is part of the *invisibilization* of Indigenous peoples because, for the most part, it fails to give voice to native peoples in telling the story of the parks. In addition, Draxler comments, "When environmentalists laud *America's best idea* and reiterate narratives about pristine national park environments, they are participating in the erasure of Indigenous peoples, thus replicating colonial patterns of white supremacy and settler privilege". Ouch.

Wanting to know more, I found [This Land Is Their Land](#), an informative article describing sixteen parks and the deep connections tribes have still with each one. When I came to one close to home – the Gateway Arch National Park, and my eyes were opened even more. I knew that the park was established as a tribute to the opening of the West, but the article reminded me that *...westward expansion also paved the way for epidemics, forced removal, armed conflict, near-extinction of bison and forced assimilation of Native Americans, among other hardships. Visitors to the St. Louis-based park can ascend to the top of the 630-foot-high Gateway Arch and contemplate the complicated legacy of Manifest Destiny and the settling of the American West.* That contemplation would be a powerful spiritual practice!

The Catholic Church, which has its own difficult history with regard to native peoples, has shown that it is waking up too, concerned that the invisible become visible by holding up the need to hear native voices that have been silenced. In paragraph 196 of *Laudato Si*, we read: *In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to*

maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best...

Maybe I will still watch the National Parks documentary and enjoy the stunning beauty; however, I will watch with a broadened vision and increased motivation to challenge my perspective on *America's Best Idea*. I will also be watchful for the many others who have been invisibilized in our world.

Photo: Thanks to Johannes Andersson in Unsplash

April 12 Workday in the Oblates' Preserve **9:00 am – 11:30**

March's workday boosted my spirits and made a big difference to the Preserve, too! Nine volunteers, including 3 from the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center's Strike Team, removed honeysuckle and cut down tree of heaven and golden raintree. Thanks to each one for a great day. In addition, students from SIUE's Newman community worked in the Pollinator Garden, readying it for restoration. Many thanks to them, too. It was a great day to be on the land, and we all enjoyed it. If you want to join us, please let me know – 618-466-5004.

April 17 Easter Sunday

I clearly recall many years ago when I learned that the date for Easter is the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Spring Equinox. What a mouthful and how appropriate, uniting feast day with cosmos! In spring, all Earth proclaims our intuition that life is changed, not ended. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins combines feast and Earth in a lovely poem. Let this stanza accompany your Easter meditation:



*Gather gladness from the skies;
Take a lesson from the ground;
Flowers do ope their heavenward eyes
And a Spring-time joy have found;
Earth throws Winter's robes away,
Decks herself for Easter Day.*

April 22 Earth Day - Invest In Our Planet

What a motivating theme for 2022! The Earth Day web site expands the theme with three headings that read to me like a litany, providing food for action and reflection:

Invest in Our Planet...and Build a Prosperous and Equitable Future
There's a way to do it better – find it. - Thomas Edison

Invest in Our Planet...and Build Healthy Cities, Countries, and Economies
The secret of change is to focus all of your energy not on fighting the old, but on



building the new. – Socrates

Invest in Our Planet...It's the Only Home We Have. We Need Everyone, While There Is Still Time.

Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world. – Dolores Huerta

On a very practical level, the web site also offers 52 ways to invest in our planet. [Use this link to find them.](#)

Photo: Thanks to Filip Urban on Unsplash

April 24 Soul Sunday and CCC Earth Day Celebration **10:30 - 11:30 and 12:00 - 2:00**

After our usual Soul Sunday focusing on Earth spirituality, the Confluence Climate Collaborative invites you to join us at the Fuller Dome to *Spring Into Spiritual Healing*. This loving Earth Day celebration honors our shared home with poetry, music, and community as we show our gratitude for the gifts our planet provides and explore ways to help her in her time of need. Light refreshments will be served. We hope to see you there!

Registration and More Information: [Visit Studio Gaia's website.](#)

Location: Fuller Dome on the Campus of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville

