

Wednesday Reflection: Brother Sun

St Francis of Assisi, 'Francesco', the thirteenth century Italian friar and mystic, said that God was in the world, in the very fabric of the earth. The Spirit of God is not to be thought of far above the sky: beyond the limits of the universe; sealed in the chambers of heaven. God, the Divine Mystery, is the Transcendent within us, in all things. Everything in the universe is alive with the Eternal. In his hymn, *Canticle to Brother Sun and Sister Moon*, Francis wrote:

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honour
and all blessings.....

Praised be You my Lord with all Your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
Who is the day through whom You give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendour,
Of You Most High, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
In the heavens you have made them bright, precious and fair.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all weather's moods,
by which You cherish all that You have made.

Praised be You my Lord through Sister Water,
So useful, humble, precious and pure.

Praised be You my Lord through Brother Fire,
through whom You light the night
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You my Lord through our Sister,
Mother Earth

who sustains and governs us,
producing varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.....

I wonder if you can feel the connectedness felt by St Francis: the dry earth beneath his feet, the heat of the Mediterranean sun on his arms, the coolness of the evening breeze on his face, and the moon's brilliant whiteness reflected in his eyes. In Christianity and other world faiths, the mystics do not ask us to believe in or sign up to a catalogue of philosophical doctrines about God; rather, they invite us to *experience* God's presence. The very earth gives God praise but we need to be still in order to hear it. The more we still our body and still our mind the more likely we are to encounter the Sacred. Another saint, Bonaventure, said that 'God is the One whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere; God exists in everything'.

On holiday recently, I found it restorative to walk along a pebbled beach; listen to the crushing power of the waves, visit an abbey to soak in Christianity's ancient spirituality, and sit alone on a hillside watching the sea, being absorbed by its vastness. In the Victorian period, the Romantics spoke of the 'oceanic feeling'; for me, it is a feeling of the overflowing, super-abundance of the Divine, overwhelming us, almost. In Athens, preaching in the Areopagus, the apostle Paul said that in God, 'we live, and move, and have our being'. In a culture renowned for its intellectual inquiry, the former Pharisee of Tarsus, invited the leading citizens of Greece to feel the Presence, to be still, open and aware of the Absolute, the Mystery that lives within all things. God dwells within us; in me and you.