

**TREAD**

SCHOOL

**SOFTLY**

ASSEMBLIES

**ACT**

TO SAVE

**BOLDLY**

THE WORLD

DEAN ATKINS

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**SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES  
TO SAVE THE WORLD**

**DEAN ATKINS**

**ST MARYS CF10**

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## Introduction

The environmental crisis caused by and now facing humanity is real. For many children and young people the facts before us can cause fear and even anger but it also fills them with enthusiasm and passion to act now to save the world.

For Christians, when we talk about the salvation of the world we mean the saving work of Christ upon the cross but we cannot understand the full depth of this work without some regard to Creation.

In the Book of Genesis, as God began creating on the day we now call Sunday, so it is also the day that Christ rose, and in his Resurrection God begins a 'New Creation' when all things are restored in Christ. So the day of Creation is also the day of Resurrection.

These School Assemblies can be used and adapted across the Key Stages, and are appropriate of course for homily outlines with all ages. They acknowledge the feelings of fear but also reinforce the hope that comes from action. It's not too late – but all of us have a responsibility, individuals and governments alike.

Here, at St Mary's – like so many other churches across the UK and the world, we are beginning to more seriously act for the sake of the beautiful world God has created and of which we are a part.

We have a deep responsibility to act as Stewards of God's Creation and we hope these Assembly outlines will reinforce the need to tread softly and act boldly.

# **A Rubbish Assembly**

## **Preparation**

Prepare a black refuse bag full of 'rubbish' – but inside the bag is perfectly good food – fresh fruit and vegetables, maybe a few ready meals, carton of fruit juice, box of eggs.

## **Introduction**

Tell the young people that you have a great treat for them today. You have brought something that you would like to share with them. Show them the bag but not what's inside it. You may want to ask them to guess what's in the bag!

Tell them that actually you have brought your weekly rubbish bag. Inside this bag are all the things you've thrown out this week. Perhaps open the bag and take a big sniff and say how 'nice' the rubbish smells!

Perhaps ask for a volunteer who is willing to place their hand into your rubbish bag without looking to take out an item. Will anyone volunteer? If not, then, one by one, take out the perfectly good food items, and explain what they are.

## **Explanation**

In the UK, householders throw away 6.7 m tonnes of unwanted food every year at a cost to us of £8bn. That's the equivalent of throwing away one bag of food for every three that we buy. Around 40% of it is fresh fruit and vegetables:

- nearly 4.5 million apples
- more than 5m potatoes
- 1.5 m bananas
- 3m tomatoes

We waste so much food and, as a result, so much money. We fill land fill sites where the food and refuse rots, producing methane, a greenhouse gas more than 20 times more damaging than carbon dioxide. God has given us so many things, so many good gifts, and we often end up wasting them, throwing them away, discarding them.

We are called to be good stewards of everything that God had given us. To be responsible with the gifts he has given. Just think of the good we could do for the environment if we didn't waste and throw away so much. Just think what we could do with the money that we waste on throwaway food, the number of hungry people that could be fed in the world.

## **Reading**

Matthew 14:15-21 - The Feeding of the 5,000

Jesus fed the hungry and he produced so much food that there was plenty left over. But none of it was wasted. It was all gathered up and placed into baskets. How we shop, how we eat, what we do with our food and money is not just an environmental issue, it is an issue that affects our relationship with God and shows what we really think of the gifts he has given us.

## **Prayer**

God,  
We really are such wasters!  
We waste so much in terms of food, money  
and resources.  
Help us to be responsible and thoughtful,  
to value everything that you have given us,  
and to share what we have with those in need  
so that we, rather than wasting things,  
can make this world a better place,  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **Don't play with your food**

## **Opening Activity**

Take various items of fruit that has a peel, such as orange, lemon, banana, and a permanent marker pen. (The reason you need the items to have peel is that you don't want the food to get ruined by what you are about to do!)

Tell the young people that you have a remarkable gift—that you can transform simple things like oranges and lemons into remarkable caricatures of people! Then go on to draw various faces—some of the pupils, and perhaps some of the teachers who are game for a laugh!

## **How we play with food!**

What I have been doing, of course, is playing around with food. Were you ever told that by your parents? 'Don't play with your food!' This usually means pushing our food around the plate in a disinterested way. We may be tempted to waste it – just because we fancy something quite different.

On another level, though, we actually do play around with our food:

- we use pesticides and other chemicals and additives to mass produce our food
- we throw away and waste so much food, as though it's not really valuable.

Food is not just a luxury but a necessity. It is something we need.

## **Thank God!**

Today we thank God for everything that he has given us, but particularly for our food and drink. We pray that we may value the food we have, and not take it for granted. We pray that we may learn to share what we have with those who don't have as much as we do.

(You may want to assure them that the food you have used in the assembly won't be wasted: that you will take the fruit home, peel it and eat it!)

## **Prayer**

God our Creator,  
help us to value everything we have been given.  
Help us to value our food  
and to share our gifts with those in need.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **Never Alone**

## **Opening Words**

In September 2011, a teenage boy walked from a woods in Germany into Berlin City Hall and stated 'I'm all alone in the world. I don't know who I am. Please help me.'

He said he had been living in the woods for about five years, and it was estimated he was about 17 years old. He told staff at the City Hall that he had been living there with his father after his mother had died but cannot remember where he came from before that. His father had died recently and, after burying his body in a shallow grave, he walked into the city of Berlin to seek help, along with those words, 'I'm all alone in the world.'

## **Feeling alone**

There are, of course, times when all of us may feel alone in the world. Even though we have friends and family and people around us, it is possible to feel quite isolated and alone. Or perhaps we think that anything we do or say just doesn't have an effect on anything or anyone around us. Yes, there may be times when we feel all alone in the world.

However, none of us is really or should ever be or feel alone. All of us have a responsibility towards one another—a responsibility to care for and show kindness, to help and encourage, to share what we have. The way we live (what we do or don't do) really does have an effect on other people.

## **The world**

And this is the case not just with individuals but with whole nations and countries. We have a responsibility to help one another. And so, when there is conflict or chaos, drought or disaster, hunger or famine, it is a most natural thing for whole countries to turn to other nations, far across the world, to offer kindness and compassion. We are, after all, part of the human family.

Yet millions of people in the developing world are already suffering from climate change as a result of the carbon emissions of the Western world. The way we live here has a detrimental affect on the lives of people thousands of miles away.

If nothing is done to stem a rise of 2°C in global average temperatures by 2050 it is thought that 250 million more people will be forced to leave their homes.

Around 30 million more people will go hungry as agricultural yields go into recession across the globe.

One to three billion people will experience terrible water shortages, while nearly a fifth of Bangladesh will be submerged as sea levels rise.

You may want to check out some of the facts that have been presented by the UN report on its UN Climate Action Website at <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange>

- Here are a few facts presented regarding Temperature rise:
- The earth is now 1.2°C warmer than it was in the late 1800s. We are not on track to meet the Paris Agreement target to keep global temperature from exceeding 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. That is considered the upper limit to avoid the worst fallout from climate change.
- 2015-2019 were the five warmest years on record while 2010-2019 was the warmest decade on record.
- On the current path of carbon dioxide emissions, temperature is expected to increase by 3-5°C by the end of the century.
- In 2019, greenhouse gas concentrations reached new highs. Carbon dioxide levels were 148 per cent of preindustrial levels.
- Greenhouse gas concentrations, already at their highest levels in 3 million years, have continued to rise.

## **We are not alone!**

No one is or should be alone in the world. The way we live (the things we do or don't do) really does leave people's lives in our hands: people thousands of miles away, people we have never met. The question we have to ask ourselves is: 'Do we wish to turn our back on people, do we really wish to leave people, whole nations, feel as if they are all alone in the world?' How will we show our belief that we are one family under God's care? How will we live out the command of Jesus to love one another as we have been loved? How do we do that on a global scale?!

## **Bible Reading**

You may want to read one of the following Bible Readings or choose one of your own

Luke 10:25-37: The Good Samaritan

1 Timothy 6:17-19: 'They are to do good and be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share.'

John 13: 'Love one another as I have loved you.'

## **Prayer**

God our Creator,  
the giver of all this is good,  
help us to value everything we have been given,  
and to turn to one another with kindness and love,  
May share all that we have been given,

so that all people may enjoy health and happiness,  
For we are one family under your care.  
We make our prayer through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **Do not be afraid**

## **Opening Activity**

You may want to tell a few corny jokes, see what reaction you get, or get some volunteers for people who think they may like to have a go at being a stand-up comedian, and see how funny they are! Prepare a few jokes, cracker style, on some postcards.

It's not easy being a stand-up comedian! One famous comedian, Johnny Vegas, once said, "You can't be a proper comic unless you've been out on stage and felt the fear!"

Like many other comedians he has become successful the hard way, playing from the bottom up, to small and difficult crowds, dealing with hecklers, meeting failure and disappointment along the way, being scared!. Usually the finished product we see on TV is a result of many years of striving to be taken seriously as a comedian!

Perhaps when we see the likes of Jonny Vegas on TV these days, we may find it difficult to believe that they ever suffered from stage fright!

## **Our own fear**

The fear felt by Jonny Vegas and many other comics through generations is not so far from our own lives really. There are occasions when we are out of our comfort zone, or when things don't quite go to plan and we wish we could wish ourselves out of the situation.

One of the constant phrases in the Bible 'Do not be afraid.' From the opening chapters of Luke the angel's message to Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist), Mary, the shepherds and to Simon Peter when he is called to follow Jesus, we get those comforting and affirming words, 'Do not be afraid.' Each of these individuals have felt the fear!

What kind of fear? Fear about the future, fear at the sight before them, fear of what they were being asked to do, fear of the unknown, fear of making mistakes or not being up to the task ahead, fear of losing or having to give up so much.

## **Eco-Fears**

Perhaps you can think of examples in your life when you have been afraid, when you have felt the fear, when you have feared for yourself or someone else. Perhaps you have been timid or shy about doing certain things, such as volunteering yourself for something or even offering help and comfort to someone. Today there is also another fear – the fear that comes from Climate Change and the Environmental Crisis.

Following God, living in his world, living for God, living for his world does not mean that we will have an easy or carefree life. God can be very demanding, and he demands much attention. But whatever he asks us to do, however fearful we may be, we can hear those words of God, 'Do not be afraid.'

And so the world and we need to be courageous, to turn our fear into action so that we can do something so important for God and the world he has made. To try to halt some of the problems human beings have created by polluting the world, ruining the world, harming God's creation.

St Paul said, 'That is why for Christ's sake I take pleasure in weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties. For when I am weak then I am strong.' (*2 Corinthians 12:10*). It is during those times of a feeling of powerlessness that Paul was able to rely more on the power and goodness of God.

So, when we look at the eco-crisis we may feel fearful and powerless. God says, 'Do not be afraid.' But then we also have a job to do! There are so many things in the world that need our attention but nothing is beyond us if it is what God is asking us to do, and if we are really serious about doing what needs to be done.

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
Sometimes we are afraid  
and feel powerless.  
After all, what can we do?  
What can I do?  
Help us not to be afraid  
but to turn our sense of powerlessness to practice,  
Our weakness to action,  
So that we may look after the world of which we are a part,  
And value all that you have given us.  
Through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

# St Benedict and the Raven

## Opening Activity

Maybe take a bird feeder with you or such things as Bird 'fat balls'. Ask if anyone here feeds the birds. What kind of food do we feed them? Peanuts and seeds, mealworms and fat balls, suet pellets. Why do we need to feed the birds? Often because their natural resources are in danger because of human development, taking away their natural habitat, etc.

## Poisoned Food

There's a story told about St Benedict (480-547) was renowned to be a very holy man indeed, and many people sought him out for his wisdom. He lived in Italy and had established a way that people could live together in community, sharing everything in common, and following God together. However, not everyone liked how well known he was! There was a priest who became misled by jealousy. Maybe he didn't like all the attention that Benedict was getting, and he decided to do something about it. Something deadly. Something terrible!

One day, the priest poisoned some bread and gave it to Benedict to eat. But Benedict knew what was happening. He called a raven to him, a bird that Benedict had befriended and used to feed from his hand each day, and told him to take the bread away to a place where no one would be able to eat it. The bird did just this, taking the bread in his beak, flying away and hiding it, and it then returned to receive his rations from Benedict.

## The Food Chain

There have been many dreadful occasions when the food chain has been poisoned and, today, we are really aware of the problem of plastic in our oceans, entering the food chain, swallowed by animals, which means that plastic also enters our own food chain. Even in hundred of years from now it will be possible to find plastic objects from our time on beaches and in the sea.

Every year, for example, around 3.5 million toothbrushes are produced around the world. Together with other everyday objects, they regularly end up as plastic debris in the sea. Here are some more stats you may want to share to get us to sit up! In an international Day of Coastal Clean Up in 2015, the following was collected:

- 2,127, 565 cigarettes and filters
- 1,024,470 plastic bottles
- 888,589 food wrappers
- 861, 340 plastic bottle caps
- 439, 571 straws and stirrers
- 424,934 plastic bags
- 402,375 glass bottles

It's the responsibility of all of us – don't discard rubbish, reduce the amount of one use plastic we use, recycle, reject plastic straws in cafes, ask local businesses if they can change their products so they are environmentally sustainable. What can we do as a school and as individuals? How can we pressurise leaders and decision makers?

## **Prayer**

God our Creator,  
we all need food to live -  
that's obvious to us!  
It's also obvious to us  
that we are damaging the planet.  
May all of humanity,  
ourselves included,  
live as responsible citizens of the world,  
and so all we can to clear up the mess that humans have made  
and pledge ourselves to renew the face of the earth.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **St Kevin and the Blackbird**

## **Opening Activity**

There is a story told about St Kevin who lived in Ireland many years ago. He was a very prayerful, holy man. Each day he would set out to a quiet place and sit or stand with arms outstretched. Sometimes, he would sit in his little hut like home with his arms outstretched though the windows.

One day he was praying and a small blackbird came to rest in his hand. Kevin stayed in the same position praying. The story goes that the bird started to make a nest in the hand and Kevin was afraid to move in case he disturbed the bird. Kevin stayed there until the bird laid his eggs, the eggs hatched and the young birds flew from the nest. That's what happened when Kevin prayed!

## **When we pray**

When we pray, we bring to God and bear upon our hearts not just our own needs but the needs of the whole world – we offer him all that we have and all that we are. We offer him the world which belongs to him.

(If this is a homily during a celebration of the Holy Eucharist, you may want to talk about how we present gifts of bread and wine which God has already given us as wheat and grapes)

It's difficult to imagine us holding the whole of the world in our hand – but we can hold and value and bring to God the seemingly ordinary and everyday things we do and say.

During his time of prayer, St Kevin must have done a lot of bird watching during that time when he had the nest in his hand. He watched the bird build the nest, lay the eggs, sit on them, and then watch the eggs hatch and the nestlings make their way into the world. Then the parents back and forth, back and forth, feeding their young, watching them grow strong until they can fly from the nest.

## **Close to home**

All these things – and more – happen so close to home – but we can so easily overlook them or be ignorant to them. We need to take notice of them, to wonder at the beauty of God's creation – we don't have to travel over the world on safari to discover the wonders of nature. They're there on our doorstep or in our garden or in our attic or under the earth and in the trees, within the walls.

Maybe we can be a bit more wide-eyed to the beauty of creation, to look after it, marvel in it, for it points us to even greater things, the God who created it. It's all his work!

Here's what another Saint - Charles de Foucauld - said – and which can be our prayer to end this time together:

“All created beauty, all beauty of Nature  
the beauty of the sunset,  
of the sea lying like a mirror beneath the blue sky,  
of the dark forest, of the garden of flowers,  
of the mountains and the great spaces of the desert,  
of the snow and of the ice,  
the beauty of a rare soul reflected in a beautiful face,  
all these beauties are but the palest reflection of yours, my God.  
All that has ever charmed my eyes in this world  
is but the poorest, the humblest reflection of your infinite Beauty.”

# St Teilo and the Stag

*The first of two assemblies featuring St Teilo.*

## Opening Words

I want to tell you about someone who lived a long time ago in South Wales.

St Teilo was born about the year 500 – and he lived at the same time as St David, the patron Saint of Wales. One day, Teilo and one of his friends, Aeddán, were busy studying at the monastery of St David when they were asked to fetch some firewood.

## St Teilo and the Stag

They weren't impressed at all at being disturbed and they didn't take to the task enthusiastically. However, they picked up their axes and went into the wood, probably huffing and puffing and moaning as they went! But it wasn't too long before they discovered that their job was much easier than they thought for two tame stags helped them to carry the wood back to the monastery.

How can we help animals and how can animals help us? We are part of an intricate web of relationships, dependent on one another, helpful to one another. But if we are going to use animals, as humans have done for thousands of years, we need to look after them, treat them with respect, and value them.

What kinds of animals do we use and for what? Get some suggestions. Think about horses, donkeys, chickens, dogs, cats, birds, bees, and animals that other people use in other countries such as camels, etc. We use each of these animals for different things from food and friendship, transport and work, sport and even entertainment.

However, even today, with trying to feed such a huge and growing population of people with intensive farming, we can be having not just an unnecessary impact on individual animals but on the world itself. Our reliance on the need for meat can mean that more carbon dioxide is produced which means rises in global warming, which in turn means extreme weather leading to floods, fires, and droughts.

What practical things can we do?

- Ask our parents to buy free range eggs
- Eat less meat – maybe have a day or two when we don't eat any meat?
- What non-meat options does our school offer for lunch time? Does it need to change?
- Try different kinds of foods that would be more environmentally friendly and which we haven't experienced before
- Try growing our own food
- Explore more about animal welfare organisations such as the RSPCA

## **Prayer**

Thank you, Lord, for all the animals of the earth.  
May we treat them with respect,  
And look after the animals in our own care  
and work for a world where care and compassion  
for all you have made rest in the hearts of all people.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **St Teilo's Fruit Trees**

## **Opening Activity**

Take in a selection of British Grown fruit (determined perhaps by the time of year you're delivering this Assembly – for example, apple, strawberries, gooseberries, blackberries, etc). Ask them what their favourite fruit is and why – maybe take a straw poll to find the school's or year group's favourite fruit" Finally, ask them if they can identify which country the fruit comes from.

## **St Teilo and the Fruit Trees**

St Teilo, a friend of St David, was born 1500 years ago in about the year 500. In 549, the yellow plague swept through Wales, and St Teilo took the survivors of his community to Dol in Brittany. There, along with a friend called St Samson he planted a grove of fruit trees.

Later, Teilo returned to Wales where he was renowned for living a holy life and he became bishop. He died on February 9 although we aren't really sure in what year. His tomb lies in Llandaff Cathedral to the right of the High Altar and his skull is kept in the south chapel.

However, 1500 years later, the grove of fruit trees he planted still exists!

## **Saved by Trees**

Trees have been called the lungs of the planet. More than 20 percent of the world oxygen is produced in the Amazon Rainforest and yet rain forests are being plummeted at a terrible rate. For example, in the Amazon around 17% of the forest has been lost in the last 50 years, mostly due to forest conversion for cattle ranching. They also provide a home to nature. More than half of the world's estimated 10 million species of plants, animals and insects live in the tropical rainforests.

Here in UK, more than 1,000 irreplaceable ancient woods have been threatened by development over the last 10 years, removing the home of so many animals and plants. These woodlands also provide an important habitat for so much wildlife, affecting the biodiversity of our environment, threatening species.

We are beginning to appreciate more and more how being close to nature can improve our own health and well-being.

## **Grow your own!**

Today, there is much interest in what's in our food and where our food comes from. Sometimes, food travels thousands of miles to get to us. Whilst some food is only available from certain countries, there are many foods that we can be growing ourselves in this country so that we don't pollute the world by non-essential transport.

Some of this food we can actually grow ourselves. How brilliant is it, if we fancied a juicy apple or some earthy potatoes just to go out our garden or to somewhere close by to pick the fruit or pull the potato from the ground, rather than in a supermarket all the time and where food often comes in so much unnecessary plastic packaging.

What can we do? Perhaps, we can

- Plant a tree in our garden or in our school
- Have a go at growing something simple, such as herbs or salad – we don't even need a garden – we can grow it on our windowsill
- Join a campaign to protect the rainforest and other trees closer to home.
- Can you think of other things?

Remember that St Teilo not only planted the trees for himself and for his own generation. The grove of fruit trees he planted remains there today. What we do now can and will benefit future generations in so many ways.

Just as we remember St Teilo 1500 years on, perhaps for something we do now someone will be thankful. They may not know who we are – but we will have helped to change the world!

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
yes, we admit that we take so much for granted  
and aren't always too bothered  
about where our food comes from  
or the impact it has on the world.  
So, today, in some way,  
we commit to taking responsibility  
and making a change  
and being the change in the world today.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **St Anthony of Padua and the Fish**

## **Opening Activity**

Imagine, here, amongst us, there is someone who one day will become a world famous footballer. Imagine, here, amongst us there is someone one day who will become a great world leader, changing the world and doing so much good. Imagine if there was someone who became a ground breaking scientist, an amazing doctor, a talented architect, or a campaigner who transforms the world. Who knows what any of us will become. Life is like an adventure and although we will meet with some disappointment along the way we all have the potential to do great and good things.

Sometimes, however, we may not just believe in ourselves, or even appreciate the gifts we have. Perhaps many of your gifts are still waiting to be discovered.

## **Preaching to the Fish**

Let me tell you about someone called St Anthony of Padua. He was born in 1195 (just 13 years after St. Francis) in Lisbon, Portugal. He became a follower of St Francis and was a powerful preacher and teacher.

St Anthony was though, at first, a very reluctant preacher. He didn't really put himself forward. You could say he was a bit shy, or lacking in confidence, or thought other people were better than he was, and didn't appreciate or realise the gifts he had.

He didn't really use his gifts...until one day! He was at a very large gathering of his community, and it was the tradition that someone preached at the end of their supper together. St Anthony hid away until he was seen and asked to preach. He began speaking, and people were amazed by his words and wisdom, and the power of his preaching.

One day, he was trying to preach in a certain town, and people just weren't interested. They just didn't want to listen. So he wandered into the countryside outside next to a river, and saw the silver fish darting through the water. Ah, he thought, if the townsfolk won't listen, I have a congregation here. And so he preached to the fish, who raised the noses and head to the water's surface.

## **Being heard**

Sometimes, you may think you are too young for people to listen to you. After all, when surrounded by adults they can think they always know better than children and young people, and so we just have to be quiet whilst they are having their "important" conversations!

But there *are* examples of children trying to make their voice heard, and who actually do get heard. You'll have all heard of Greta Thurnberg, I'm sure, who started a revolution, talking about Climate Change and the importance of doing something now to avert environmental disaster

On some of the many occasions when she was addressing large groups of politicians world leaders, she would tap the microphone, and say, 'Can you hear me? Can you hear me? Is this microphone working?' 'Yes,' came the reply from the gathered leaders. "Oh," she replied, "It's because sometimes I just don't think you hear me. I say the same things, time and time again, and I don't think you hear me."

Now, perhaps, Politicians, governments and leaders are beginning to listen to her and the millions of children and young people around the world who are speaking up and have demonstrated about Climate Change – although, perhaps, they have been slow to act, and there is still so much to do.

Some people have been cynical about what the scientist have been telling us. They've ignored the warning signs but now the UN's most recent report into Climate Change and the environmental crisis (2021) applies even greater pressure to countries and all peoples.

Yes, only governments can make major, global change but it's important that they and we realise that most of them are only in power because they've been voted in by the public, and there is power in our preaching. The message, though, isn't just for governments. We have to practice what we preach! To take individual responsibility for living gently upon the earth.

What can we do today?

## **Prayer**

God,  
We have seen the warning signs,  
We have had heard the message  
May governments, leaders and all people,  
including us,  
do all we can to care for the world you have created,  
to put preaching into practice,  
to turn words into actions,  
and care into change.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## **St Francis and the Grasshopper**

*This assembly can take place indoors – but if you’re able to lead some kind of assembly or class prayer outdoors then this can easily be adapted to appreciate even more the outdoor noises of nature.*

### **Opening Activity**

Are there any musicians here? What musical instruments can you play or are you learning? How many people can sing? If you play a musical instrument, you may want to entertain the children and young people to a short rendition. Alternatively, you may want to demonstrate your inability to play by perhaps borrowing using a musical instrument from the school and attempting to play something (inevitably) badly! See what reaction you get!

### **Musical Tastes**

We all have different musical tastes and gifts. Some of us may not be confident at singing in public but we may feel more comfortable and able singing as part of a group of people or choir.

But let’s forget about music, and making sounds. Let’s be still and quiet – as quiet and still as possible. What can we hear? Depending on the context of the school, we’ll hear different noises. The cooks in the kitchen, other classes, people arriving at reception, the noise of traffic and car horns, people passing by the school, the noise of the building, pipes creaking. What about the natural noises? Can we hear anything? Bird song, the wind, the leaves of the trees. Yes, sometimes, we need to be quiet and really listen – or we may actually just take all the sounds for granted, as part of our normal day.

When you’re outdoors we can hear lots of sound and music from nature. Birds sing for all kinds of different, to attract attention, to find a mate, to mark out their territory, to alert other birds to the presence of food, in aggression, because they are happy. Their sounds are music to our ears.

### **St Francis of Assisi**

Let’s go back a thousand years, before any of us existed! Let’s think about a very beautiful follower of Jesus called St Francis. He loved everything God had made. He loved God’s creation.

One day, a grasshopper was continually chirping, which, by its song, excited St Francis to praise God. He knew how to admire God’s works even in the smallest of creatures. One day he called the grasshopper to him, which immediately perched on his hand. He said to it, “Sing, my sister grasshopper; rejoice and praise the Lord your Creator.”

The grasshopper immediately began to chirp, and didn’t stop until Francis sent him away back to its place. This happened each day, for eight days, Francis then said to his friends, “Let

us give leave to our sister grasshopper to depart, for she has now sufficiently cheered us by her song, and for these eight days past has excited us to praise our God.”

The sounds of the created word are beautiful and amazing. In their own way, the creatures give praise to God because they are doing what God created them to do. They are music to God’s ears!

## **Music to God’s Ears**

The same, too, when we do what we are created for – to love God and love each other, to care for the world, to care for one another – we are music to God’s ears. We praise him just by doing what we were created to do.

But then, of course, there are times, when we aren’t music to God’s ears – when we are selfish or spiteful, when we takes things for granted, when we are hurtful to others, when we harm God’s world and all he has created.

But Jesus also said that when we turn away from these things, say sorry and make amends, the angel’s sing in heaven!

Human beings are capable of doing amazing things, but we also do terrible things. At the moment, the world is at a crisis point, but it’s not too late. As a whole human race, which means every individual, we can turn away from the harmful things we do to the world, we can make amends, change our ways, but we need to do it soon.

What can we do?

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
St Francis loved everything you had made,  
and the sounds of nature  
filled his heart with love for you.  
Help us to care for our world,  
just like Francis,  
that our hearts, too, may be filled with love for you  
and all you have made.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,

# St Francis and the First Nativity

## Opening Activity

If possible, take the figures from a small nativity scene with you, and lay them out on a table, perhaps asking the children and young people to identify each figure. Finally, place the animal figures in position.

There are some examples of Italian Nativity scenes where there are hundreds of figures – not just the immediate characters in the house and stable in Bethlehem but the whole town. Perhaps on small cardboard rolls you could draw a few of the children's (and staffs?) faces to and place them in the Nativity scene too!

## The First Nativity Scene

The idea of having a Nativity Scene in our homes and churches at Christmas time began 800 years ago, except that the first scene didn't have plastic or ceramic figures but real animals, and it was created by someone called St Francis.

He lived at Assisi, and his life had been turned around from being a rich, partygoing, carefree figure to one who embraced poverty for the sake of Jesus, and he had a deep love and respect for all that God had created.

At Greccio near Assisi, around 1220, Francis celebrated Christmas by setting up the first known Nativity Scene. He wanted to create a scene that would excite the senses of those who looked on. In this way, he was trying to represent the birth of Jesus and its significance in a direct and visible way.

There is no mention of animals in the gospel story of the nativity but the fact that Jesus was laid in a feeding trough suggests that he was born in a place where animals were kept inside the house or, in a stable, as we may refer to it today.

In the Christmas Carol, In the Bleak Midwinter, written as a poem by Christina Rossetti, we sing:

*Enough for Him, whom Cherubim  
worship night and day,  
a breastful of milk  
and a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom Angels  
fall down before,  
the ox and ass and camel  
which adore.*

It's a beautiful image of the whole of heaven and earth adoring Jesus – the angels and cherubim, his mother Mary, and even the animals, the ox and ass and camel all adore him. So Jesus was born among the animals. He didn't just enter the human world, but was born into and lived as part of the whole of creation.

## **God of all Creation**

If we live as if we are not part of the whole of creation but are somehow above or beyond or outside it, we fail to recognise that God has come to redeem the whole world, that his significance is global, cosmic! He is the King of all creation - and not just this planet but everything that is beyond us, the universe and everything!

It was through Christ that the whole of Creation came into being and it was for Christ that the whole of creation was made.

*In the letter of St Paul to the Colossians (1:15), we read of Jesus:*

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation;  
for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created,  
things visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—  
all things have been created through him and for him.  
He himself is before all things,  
and in him all things hold together.”*

Unfortunately, we often live as though the world is simply a disposable commodity, that we can use as our whim, rather than as belonging to Christ.

So, let's live with that in mind. Mindful that the world actually belongs to God which he has given us to enjoy but also to take of.

Scientists tell us that the environmental problems created by humanity can be addressed. It's not too late but we have to act now!

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
your Son Jesus came into the world  
which was created through him and for him.  
Give us the strength to do all that we can  
to care for the world  
and to address the crisis facing us.  
May politicians, and industrialists,  
governments and industrialists  
respond in a way that is real and effective.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **St Martin de Porres**

## **Opening Activity**

Ask the children and young people what kind of jobs are there in school? Head teacher and senior staff, Teachers and Teaching assistants, Cooks and dinner supervisors, caretakers or site managers, secretaries, bursars, governors, etc (depending on the type of school there will be so many different more jobs and roles, as well, of course, as all the people who visit school to enrich the curriculum and work with pupils. If you're a visitor to the school, and are uncertain what jobs there are – you may have ask someone!)

Each of these jobs are important – some more obvious than others, some are hidden and go unseen by many of us. Whether you're a headteacher or a cleaner, a dinner supervisor or a caretaker, we all play a part in making the school what it is!

## **There's a rat in my kitchen, what am I gonna do?**

Just over four hundred years ago, there lived someone we now know as Saint Martin de Porres. He was born in Lima, Peru in 1579. He wanted to be a missionary and to travel the country and the whole world sharing the good news of Jesus but he actually never left Peru.

At the age of fifteen he entered a community of Dominican Friars. Here he was happy to do all the little tasks, such as sweeping and cleaning and cooking, which is why he is often represented holding a broom (if you have an icon or image of him you may want to show it) He cared for orphans and the poor, and those who were sick, but he never left the city of Peru.

He also had a love of God's creation, and there was a time in the monastery when the monastery seemed to have an infestation of rats. His brothers had a plan to lay poison and traps to kill the rats but St Martin was having none of it. He went into the chapel, spoke to the rats, told them what was going to happen, and gently shooed them away, and they left without a grumble!

## **Sharing the world**

For some, that may seem a fantastical, unbelievable thing, but what's the meaning it underlies for us today?

Sometimes, certain animals may appear to be pests – think of seagulls in certain city centres and coastal towns, for instance! And yet it is human beings who have taken over their natural habitat and so they have to find new ways, different ways to live, survive, feed and breed.

We are learning more and more about how human beings are destroying the natural habitat and destroying biodiversity because of the way we live and move and build on green spaces.

But we are part of a perfectly balanced planet, and if animals keep being endangered and removed from the eco system, so many things will become unbalanced.

In the book of Genesis, human beings are given the responsibility to be stewards of creation, to care for it. Yes, politicians, governments, developers and town planners need to take big action but we aren't powerless. We can do some small things. In our own gardens we can create wildflower areas, put up bird boxes and bird feeders, not use pesticides and chemical, and so on. Can you think of other things?

How can we, like St Martin, find simple and creative ways to care for the planet God has created?

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
thank you for the beautiful world you have created  
May we care for and look for simple and creative ways  
to show that we are part of the intricate world you have created.  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*This kind of assembly could be accompanied by an action such as giving wildflower seeds to the children, or as part of a school project to sow a wild flower area or hang bird feeder or bird boxes in the grounds.*

# St Cuthbert and the Otters

## Opening Activity

Ask the children and young people what subjects they find really easy? What subjects do some do some find really difficult? Each of us is different. Some may find working with numbers really easy, and others find it a challenge. Some may be amazingly artistic and creative, others good at sport, some good at writing imaginative stories. Yes, we are all different, and none of us really can excel at everything! After all, if we were all able to write as good as Shakespeare or think as brilliantly as Albert Einstein (*or use other examples, here!*) we'd have nothing to marvel in and entertain us and take our breath away, we'd have nothing to learn from each other.

There may be times when we think that certain things are beyond us, but together we can share our gifts to do great things. At the moment, the world seems to be in danger of global warming, pollution and so many other things, and we may think the task to make things better is beyond us. But we can always turn things around! But first let me tell you a story from a long time ago about someone called St Cuthbert!

## St Cuthbert and the Otters

Cuthbert lived as a monk on the Island of Lindisfarne in the 7th century, and soon acquired a reputation of great holiness. While visiting another monastic community he was known to slip outside in the middle of the night and return in the morning. A fellow monk wanted to find out what he did, so one night he followed him from a distance. He discovered that Cuthbert waded into the sea up to his neck.

When morning came he returned, knelt on the beach, and prayed. While he did so, "two otters bounded out of the water, stretched themselves out before him, warmed his feet with their breath, and tried to dry him with their fur. They finished, received his blessing, and slipped back to their watery home".

## Otters in the UK today

Twenty-five years ago, the otter population in England and Wales was on the brink of extinction after half a century of agricultural chemicals leaching into the rivers and polluting the food chain.

Thankfully, following the ban of these chemicals in the early 1990s, water quality increased and the slow-road to recovery began. Fish populations returned to the rivers and lakes, and as a result you are more likely to see an otter today than at any time in the past sixty years.

The revival of the otter across Britain has been one of the great conservation successes of the past fifty years. Having been threatened with extinction in the late 1950's, numbers have

slowly recovered, and following a ban on hunting in 1978 and improvements to river quality, otters can now be found in every British county.

## **It's not too late**

This is an example that, even though we have many warning signs about what human beings are doing to the world, it's not too late to turn things around. We need to recognise and accept that there is a problem, look at what we can do to change things for the better, and put it into action.

Our encounter with nature may not be so intimate as St Cuthbert's, but we can encounter nature, and take delight from it. And if habitats are being destroyed we can create our own habitat, in our gardens, like a hedgehog home or a toad abode, a bee hotel or even be creative with a window box or balcony.

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
your world is filled with beauty,  
It is full of your majesty and power and love,  
and yet it is also so fragile and easily damaged.  
Help us to care for the homes and habitats  
of all the creature and plants you have made,  
to speak out against environmental damage  
and to be active in our own communities.  
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **St Melangell and the hare**

## **Opening Activity**

The recent COVID pandemic of 2020-21 has affected us in so many ways. There were, of course, so many things that were challenging and difficult. You may want to get some responses from them about the difficulties – although this assembly is about concentrating on some of the good that has come out of that awful time.

So what things, in looking back, were good about it? A new appreciation of all the things we took for granted? An appreciation for family and friends, of being able to do all the things we did without thinking likes shopping, playing in the park, sports, entertainment?

One thing that many people benefitted from was a renewed appreciation of the natural world. Many people took to gardening, perhaps for the first time, whilst others on their walk appreciated the sights and sounds of nature – the birds and squirrels, trees and plants. During Lockdown, amazing environmental changes were experienced. Whilst the world was coping with the terrible toll on humanity caused by the pandemic, nature seemed to be breathing more easily (and there are even stories like the herd of goats who came down from the Welsh Mountains to enjoy the quiet of the local town!)

There was less traffic on our roads, less industry. First China, then Italy, then the UK, and Germany and dozens of other countries experienced temporary falls in carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide of as much as 40%, greatly improving air quality and reducing the risks of asthma, heart attacks and lung disease. For many experts, it was a glimpse of what the world might look like without fossil fuels.

## **St Melangell**

Whilst we're looking to the future let's for a moment, go back 1500 years to the time of someone called St Melengell (died 590) the daughter of King Jowchel of Ireland.

A King of Ireland had plans for his daughter Mellangell to marry a nobleman of his court. But she had other plans. She didn't want to get married. She wanted to live a simple life of prayer for God. This made her father very angry and she had no choice but to leave her home and family, taking refuge in the Welsh Pennant Valle. Here she lived a solitary, prayerful life, eating nuts and berries, sheltering in a cave with only animals for companions.

One day the Prince of Powys was out hunting. He startled a hare and with his hounds gave chase. They came to a thicket of thorns where the Prince was startled to see Melangell kneeling, deep in prayer, with the hare calmly facing the hounds from beneath the hem of her cloak.

The terrified hounds retreated, and refused to attack the hare. 'How have you come to be here?' asked the Prince. She told him how she had lived in this he replied that she had lived alone in this place since leaving her home fifteen years earlier. Moved by her courage and

compassion he gave her land in the valley to be a sanctuary for others seeking peace and solitude. Melangell agreed to this with the added condition that the land be not only a refuge for people but also for all creatures who like herself had no recourse but to flee when threatened.

## **Giving Room to Nature**

Nature has an amazing ability to be able to fight back – if only we give it chance. That's exactly what we have to let it do, creating spaces for wildlife to thrive. And looking for environmentally friendly and sustainable ways to power our lives, to live our lives. We are called to tread softly upon the earth and to act boldly. So many habitats are in danger – not just the rainforests of South America but also close to home, in our own country, in our own community.

St Melangel teaches us the importance of allowing nature to thrive. If we give it space, it will fight back.

## **Prayer**

God our Father,  
help us have a new appreciation of the world you have made,  
to protect and create spaces where nature can thrive,  
and which also can become places where we can get close to nature  
and appreciate the wonder of your being.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# All shall be well

## Opening Activity

There are lots of life extending things to do or not to do. Just think of all the advice we are given: don't smoke, eat a balanced, healthy diet, five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, take physical exercise, and so on. If we do take heed of this advice we will have healthier lives and, hopefully, enjoy a longer life. There are also lots of things, too, that people do to make them look younger: buying expensive oils and creams and ointments, applying makeup, dyeing your hair, etc. There are lots of ways to look younger or live longer!

*(As a visual aid, you may want to take some packets of food or other items which contain advice about how much to eat or drink, or how much they contribute (or not!) towards a healthy diet)*

## Can you live longer by worrying?

'Can one of you add a day to your life by worrying?' That's what Jesus asks. (*Matthew 6:25-34*) Will worrying make you live longer?! There are so many things that people worry about: money, work, home, friends, family, their children, clothes, time, schoolwork, someone's health, your own health, things that happen in the world, war, violence, and so on.

Sometimes we worry about things and the worrying doesn't actually change anything. It becomes a wasted emotion. Some people say, 'I was worried sick' or 'I was worried to death.' 'Don't worry,' said Jesus. If God looks after the flowers and the grass and the birds in the sky then he will look after you, too because you are worth more than many sparrows.

And yet, things like Global warming and the environmental crisis can really cause us to worry. But simply worrying about something won't change things. We have to be active!

## Why worry? All shall be well

We are precious and valuable to God. He knows us through and through. Saint Julian of Norwich (who lived in the second half of the 14th century) said, 'All shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.' Show them a small hazelnut. Julian once had a vision of God holding in his hand a small hazelnut.

The hazelnut represented everything that ever was, everything that ever existed. It existed simply because God looked at it and loved it. God too looks at us and loves us. We exist because he has made us. We exist because he loves us. So don't worry about this or that—all shall be well.

Imagine God holding, in the palm of his hand, the whole world, as though it was as small as a hazelnut. He looks upon it and loves it.

## **Prayer**

God, we worry about so many things.  
Help us to be confident in your love.  
Help us to know that you are with us always  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

# **A Call to Action**

## **Opening Activity**

Hold in your clenched hand a small tea/votive light but don't show them what you hold. Tell them you have something in your hand that can change the world. Something that can feed the hungry, stop wars, help people to live together in peace. Can they guess what it is? Open your palm and show them the small candle. Now, you may ask 'How on earth can that small candle change the world?!'

There are so many great problems in the world, so many things that need to be sorted out: wars and conflicts, street crime, millions of people going hungry, poverty and injustice, and, the problems caused by pollution and, climate

How on earth can this little candle change the world, and avert the crisis?

## **Small Lights**

There is an old proverb that goes, 'It's better to light one small candle than to curse the darkness.' It would be so easy to look at the problems in the world and think, 'What can we do? What difference can we make?' Why bother?

But it is far better to do what we can rather than doing nothing at all. It is better to light a small candle than to sit around complaining how dark it is! St Teresa of Calcutta once said, 'We are asked to do no great thing, only small things done with great love.'

## **Doing the small things**

Most of us are not called to do great things, in the eyes of the world, at least. Some people are, of course! But most of us won't be the Prime-minister or leading politicians or world leaders or the President of the US. With the present environmental problems perhaps there is much more that they can do!

But can you imagine if everything we did, every little thing, was filled with great love how the world could then be transformed around us? God takes the little things that we do and transforms them. He makes them significant!

This little candle symbolises all the little things we can do in order to transform the world around us. It could be turning off a light switch when we're not in the room. Reducing the amount of plastic we use. Recycling more. Not wasting food. Fixing that dripping tap. What else? Yes, the small things are really important.

## **Prayer**

*Light the candle*

Father, as we light this small candle,  
help us to think about how the small things we are asked to do  
can bring light and love to those around us.  
Help us to fill every small thing with great love.  
We ask this through Jesus the Lord. Amen.

## God's Garden Adventure

God's Garden Adventure is an audio trail created at St Mary's Church which draws children through the wonders of nature, exploring our responsibilities towards all that God has made.

The crosses use beautifully painted Latin American Crosses depicting different scenes from the Great Flood to the Good Shepherd, from the Crucifixion to the Resurrection.

The trail is available to anyone online which means that you can use the resource wherever you are by planting painted crosses in your gardens or grounds, and following the audio for each stop. You can view the crosses and the particular images for each meditation on our website.

You can also use the meditations for the basis of a school assembly or a time of class prayer, particularly for more reflective and imaginative prayer time or Christian mindfulness. There is also a similar trail available on our website which is suitable for older young people called Stations of Creation.

For more information and to listen to the audio trail check out <https://stmaryscf10.com/gods-garden-adventure/>

As the introduction to the Adventure goes:

*Are you ready to go on a journey? We won't be going very far and there'll be a few stops along the way. We'll be stopping at beautifully coloured crosses hidden amongst the bushes and plants and trees. So keep your eyes peeled. There's lots to see, and lots to think about. Ready? Let's go!*

## The Great Flood

What can you see?

A deep blue sea, with silver fish and colourful sea horses  
A dove swooping through the sky beneath a golden sun,  
holding in his beak a small olive branch.  
And there, bobbing on the waves, is the Ark of Noah,  
a boat filled with his family,  
and with every kind of animal on board.  
They have survived a great flood  
which almost destroyed the whole world.

Today, there are lots of things which spoil the world,  
and this can be frightening.  
But each of us can do something great.  
It doesn't always have to be a big thing  
Sometimes, the smallest act can make a big difference.

What can we do, what can *you* do, to make a big difference in the world today?

## **The Lion and Lamb**

What can you see?

A rainbow stretched across the sky.  
A dove flying beneath a blazing sun.  
There are flowers everywhere.  
A family is waving or raising their hands,  
maybe reaching to feel the warmth of the sun,  
or perhaps they are praying and praising God.  
The children are sheltered close to their parents  
who care so much for them.

And beneath them, among the beautiful flowers, is a lion and a lamb.  
You'd think the lion would swallow the lamb in one big gulp,  
filling his belly with a burp and a satisfied growl,  
or maybe taking it away to feed his cubs.

But, no, this is a different kind of world being painted here.  
The lion and the lamb are friends.  
It's the kind of world that God want us to make.  
He wants us to be friends with one another,  
to care for each other  
and, together, to care for the world.

God loves us so much.  
God loves you so much.  
He has given us a beautiful world in which to live.

What can we do to show our care for that world?

## **Our Father**

What can you see?

Jesus with his arms raised high,  
open to God his Father,  
and open to us too.  
He is calling us, inviting us, to be part of his family,  
so that we, like him, can call God our Father.

Here, Jesus is surrounded by animals and plants and flowers.  
Just like you are, right now.

Can you hear the breeze in the trees?

We can't see God  
but his Spirit breathes through our life  
like a gentle breeze or a powerful wind,  
filling our lives with the presence of Jesus.

Jesus is close.  
He is with us now.  
He is always with us.

Be still and silent, now, just for a moment, and know that Jesus is here.

## **The Crucifixion**

What can you see?

Jesus arms are stretched out on the cross.  
and across the wood of the cross are budding flowers,  
The cross is full of life and colour.  
Jesus died on the cross because he loved the world so much,  
And his love was so strong that not even death could end it.  
A few days later, Jesus rose from the dead,  
to live for ever.  
The cross of Jesus is a beautiful reminder of how much God loves us.

Even when things seem to be at their worst,  
when life is difficult or dark,  
God is doing something new and wonderful  
bringing life.

And he wants us to be part of all that is good in the world.

Can you do something good in the world today?

## **The Risen Lord**

What can you see?

Jesus with his arms open wide,  
raised to heaven,  
raised to God his Father,

You can see that the world is beginning to grow again and burst with life,  
as grass grows and pushes its way through the stubborn rocks.

The dove above the head of Jesus  
is a sign of God's Holy Spirit.  
The Spirit is God's power in the world  
drawing us close and closer to Jesus,  
Showing us who Jesus is.

Can you see the houses too?  
Jesus is with us wherever we are  
At home or when we are away.  
He is with us in the beauty of creation  
and in our communities and through the streets.  
He is in our homes.  
He is with us when we are awake and when we are asleep.

How can you make your home and the place where you live, alive with God's presence?

## **The Good Shepherd**

What can you see?

The bright sun shining on a friendly face.  
It's Jesus the Good Shepherd  
and he's carrying a sheep on his shoulders.  
Maybe, if you listen carefully enough,  
you can hear the soft bleat of the sheep  
so happy is he to be returning home to the flock.  
For this little sheep has been lost for some time.  
alone and afraid.  
He had wandered away from his friends.  
But Jesus brings him safely home.

Sometimes, we may feel alone in the world,  
Lost and not knowing where we are.  
Things may frighten us or cause us to worry.  
But Jesus doesn't want any of us to be lost  
Jesus doesn't want any of us to be afraid.  
He is our friend.  
And, like a shepherd who goes out of his way to find us,  
he carries us home safely  
with joy in his heart.

How can you let someone know that God loves them and cares for them?