

Big Rivers

Michelle Gorman, RSM

Metaphors for the World we Live in....

A Retreat to experience the gift of Creation

INSIDE

—

Songs to inspire hope

Listen with the ear of your heart to participate in the music of the universe.

—

Poems to challenge pre-conceived ideas

Read the poems aloud more than once to help your whole body experience the rhyme and rhythm of your life.

—

Reflection Questions to awaken your energy for loving action.

Action is love made visible.
Kahlil Gibran



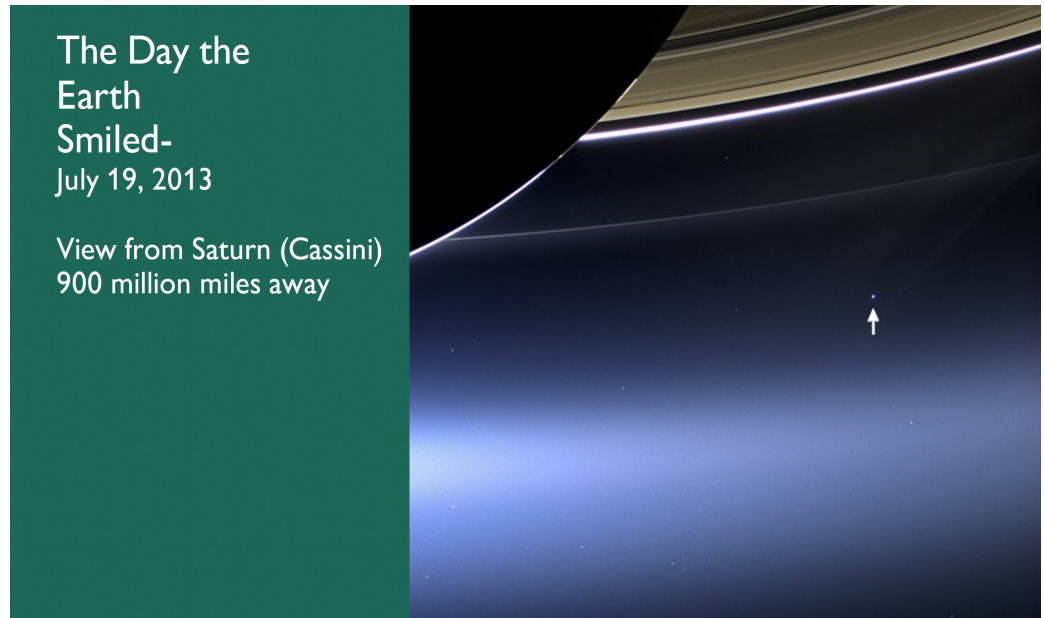
Greetings and welcome to this retreat to help you experience the gift of creation. The retreat is presented from the point of view of five big rivers that are representative of all the rivers/streams on earth, and therefore, of the Earth Herself (Mother Earth).

The retreat is laid out in seven sessions. I invite you to pray with the content over seven days, or if you do not have seven days in a row, plan to spend 20 minutes per day for as long as it takes (or even 5 minutes per day). You know your schedule and time availability.

This retreat is not intended to share a multitude of facts about the state of our rivers/planet. Such information is readily available via the internet and elsewhere; rather, **I invite you to become present to the mystery and reality of your presence on this planet- the gift and privilege that you have been chosen out of all the possibilities to be Here Now.** To that end, I offer the

following to help bring you into the mystery of God’s presence in the cosmos, the planet, and in your life.

Our Context is Cosmic



The Day the
Earth
Smiled-
July 19, 2013

View from Saturn (Cassini)
900 million miles away

1. As you gaze with soft eyes on this picture and ponder the mystery of earth (that little dot), spend 5 minutes being aware of your breathing, and remember that the only place we humans have evolved to breathe is on this planet.
2. <https://youtu.be/Jgraiy4LgN8> (A Holy Embrace- Jan Novotka)
3. Let us become beginners again in learning to love our earth. Read Denise Levertov’s poem, “Beginners.”

Reading the Poems

Read each poem 3 times.

Keep a journal of your
thoughts.

First Reading

Jot down words that
attracted you.

Second Reading

Jot down or mark phrases
that attracted you.

Third Reading

What thoughts/feelings are
emerging from deep within
you?

...Even the weariest river winds somewhere to the sea—"

But we have only begun to love the earth.

We have only begun to imagine the fullness of life.

How could we tire of hope? —so much is in bud.

*How can desire fail? —we have only begun to imagine justice and mercy,
only begun to envision how it might be to live as siblings with beast and flower,
not as oppressors.*

Surely our river cannot already be hastening into the sea of nonbeing?

Surely it cannot drag, in the silt, all that is innocent?

*Not yet, not yet— there is too much broken that must be mended,
too much hurt we have done to each other that cannot yet be forgiven.*

*We have only begun to know the power that is in us if we would join
our solitudes in the communion of struggle.*

*So much is unfolding that must complete its gesture,
so much is in bud.*

Source: “Beginners” from *Candles in Babylon*, by Denise Levertov. New York:
New Directions, 1982.

Use this page for

Remembering...

Investigating...

Verifying...

Emerging...

Reciting...

Simplifying...

Big Rivers: The Mississippi (USA) flows into the Gulf of Mexico- creating a Dead Zone.



The Negro Speaks of Rivers

By Langston Hughes (1901-1967)

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers. I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.

I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.

I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers. My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

From the Collected Works of Langston Hughes 1994...

<https://youtu.be/w9GkaVsydNY>

May all I do today...Jan Novotka

The End Result

of pollution in the Mississippi is a Dead Zone in the Gulf.

The Mississippi River and its tributaries drain 41% of the US and carry the runoff nutrients that cause the Gulf's dead zone.

Record-breaking Midwest rainfall washes tons of fertilizer and sewage water out to sea, contributing to a large patch of polluted water. Nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, cause bursts of algal growth, consuming oxygen as the plants decompose. This causes *hypoxia*, suffocating and killing sea-life in the area. This dead zone encompasses approximately 8,000 square miles off the coast of Louisiana and Texas where the Mississippi empties into the ocean.

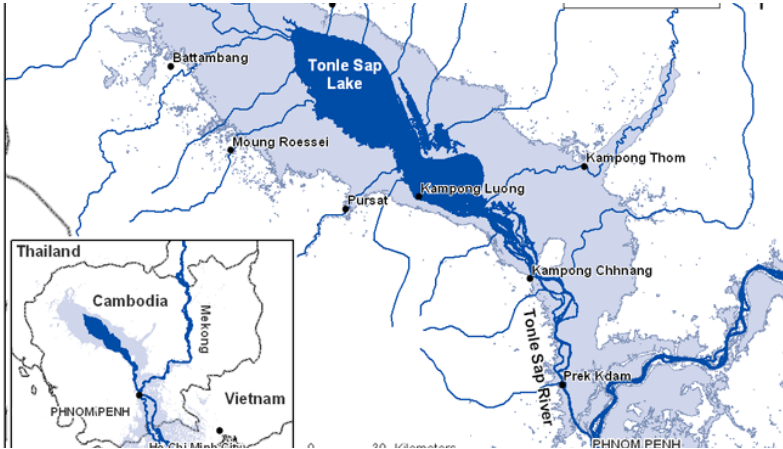
As well as choking off an ecosystem, this situation impacts the Gulf's seafood industry, which accounts for more than 40% of seafood in the US. Because fish try to avoid the poisonous dead zone, they move further out to sea, thus causing fishermen more time and money as they follow the fish. One wonders about the health of such fish for public consumption.



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/)

PFAS Contamination The Mississippi River flows from Lake Itasca in northern Minnesota to the Mississippi River Delta in the Gulf of Mexico- 2,340 miles (3,766 km). Recently (2022), the EPA announced that PFAS contamination from a large 3M factory on the Mississippi north of Cordova, Illinois, endangered the drinking water of approximately 300,000 people. PFAS are used in consumer and industrial products and pose a wide range of health problems. The 3M factory in question manufactures adhesives for products like Post-It Notes and Scotch Tape. Is this an isolated situation in the Mississippi? No. How about in your bioregion? Are there human needs more urgent than Post-It Notes? What song is the Mississippi singing? **How will you pray about this?**

Big Rivers: The Mekong/Tonle Sap River (Cambodia)



Unique Connection

The Mekong River and the Tonle Sap River/Lake (Cambodia)

The Mekong (MK) and Tonle Sap (TS) River/Lake enjoy a unique relationship. The 4,800 km MK meets the TS at Phnom Penh in Cambodia. During the monsoon season (May to October), the MK floods and backs up into the TS, thus reversing the flow of the TS from southeast to northwest for six months every year.

This process provides a huge benefit to TS Lake by the transportation of sediments, nutrients, and an abundance of fish into the TS Lake. The seasonal flow also enlarges the lake's floodplain from approximately 20-40 km. Farmers and fishers of Cambodia have developed unique cultural and economic practices based on this cycle. Aquatic species have also adapted over millennia. The impact of human-made dams already threatens this lifestyle.



Photo by Michelle Gorman, RSM

Floating Villages

Floating houses (nomads) and houses on stilts (permanent)

The floating village is the portrait of a humanity, of a way of life, precarious but in balance, like a swaying hammock over a swaying house." (Ruben Martin de Lucas) The floating houses are made from bamboo which allows them to float on the water during the monsoon season. The houses on stilts are more permanent. Approximately one million people here provide 16% of the GDP of Cambodia.

Mekong Blues

Nina Sherizze, October 2015

The wind told me:

"My current will take you to the ocean,
Like blood flowing through the heart."

And I asked the wind,

"What if the river runs dry?"

And the heart stops beating?"

"Then you'll find where you truly belong-

The still river or the deep blue (sea)," says the fleeting wind.

By Breath... Sara Thomsen

<https://youtu.be/5HgOJiJRKMM>

By breath, by blood, by body, by spirit,
we are all one...

The water that is my blood, my sweat,
tears from crying

Is the water that is your blood, your
sweat, tears from crying

And the rising of the tide is in our veins
and in the ocean wide

We are in the rising steam, rushing
river, running stream...

Big Rivers: The River Mara (Kenya)



The Masai Mara

Sai Kiran Ramarapu

When I close my eyes,
I can see it.
I can see the sky above me,
filled in red,
as if the sun's peeking from the
horizon, and its rays piercing
through the clouds.
I can see the animals-
which are as tall as trees,
and as fast as cars,
which are as strong and as fierce
as mountains,
which are as cute as babies-
roam across these plains.
I can see the eighth wonder-
the greatest migration to ever
take place on planet earth
happen across the Mara River.
I can see the people-
the Masai Warriors,
the guardians of the land,
who open their arms,
and welcome us into their world.
When I close my eyes,
I can see it.
It feels like I'm in Kenya,
back in the Masai Mara.

Will the Mara Survive?

And who is impacted? The whole ecosystem.

Between the Enapuiyapui Swamp in northern Kenya and the Mara Swamp in Tanzania flows the Mara River. The wildebeest migration, covering 10,000 square miles, has defined this Serengeti and Maasai Mara region for over 1.5 million years, shaping the ecosystem.

Increased deforestation in the north has led to flooding of the river, causing drowning of an inordinate number of animals crossing its path. The climate crisis impacts the land without its forest cover leading to more intense droughts. Skyrocketing human population has led to increased demand for agriculture, shrinking the rangelands that the Maasai and the wildebeest depend on. **Where else have you seen deforestation impacting an ecosystem? How is that impacting your life?**



Water is Life

Sara Thomsen

https://youtu.be/4TPrsx5T4_I

We are the river, come; we are the water, come.

We are the boat, the paddle, the shore,

We are One.

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

How do you feel your Oneness with the Mara River? Why?

Redefining the Dream

The Martuwarra Fitzroy River flows through the Kimberley Region of Western Australia. It is one of the world's last remaining free-flowing rivers, and the indigenous peoples of the area want to keep it that way. Their intention is to integrate the values that have allowed them to maintain custody of the river and its catchment area for millennia- all while the Western Australia government and big-time developers aim to use the resources of the river for irrigation and mining interests. It is a constant challenge to negotiate for the good of the ecosystem when multinationals and governments have so much power to place profits over values and visions. The Western dream of progress at any cost will have to be redefined in favor of "forever economies" with the possibility of creating sustainability for future generations.



Songlines

Maps for Life

<https://youtu.be/kVOG-RKTFlo>

What are Songlines? (Colin Jones)

<https://youtu.be/rXbrOSDmUpq>

Marlalloo Songline (3.54)



Denise Coghlan, RSM with MELF Fellows, August 2022- Siem Reap, Cambodia. The "woman at the well" demonstrates the power of marginalized people to use their voice. Jesus (representing the status quo in that story) acknowledges the woman's equality with him. "Give me a drink."



Development?

Fitzroy River Council

"If you want to do any development in the Fitzroy River catchment, show us your science, let us peer review it, show us that you're not going to create any foreseeable harm, and then we can negotiate in good faith and determine just development on just terms. It needs to be within boundaries that are going to sustain our livelihoods, our economies, and our spiritual and cultural identity and wellbeing."

"As Aboriginal people, we do not separate land, water, and people." Anne Poelina

Big Rivers: The River Shannon (Ireland)



Where the River Shannon Flows

Bridie Gallagher

<https://youtu.be/unWzOnbRhBU>

Questions for Prayer and Reflection
 What river is near where you live?
 What kind of life does it support?
 Does it look healthy?

Where does it originate and where does it end?

How is it affected by the climate and local population?

Who benefits from its waters? Is anyone excluded?

What costs are associated with it?

How do you relate to this river?

What kinds of rights does this river have? What kinds of rights should this river have?

What is your prayer for this river and your bioregion?

Gracious, Gentle Spirit of Love, your energy permeates the universe, igniting Earth with your goodness, truth, and beauty. May we experience your presence within the sacred web of creation, Amen.

Indigenous to the Earth

The Dublin Statement on Water and Sustainable Development 1992

We are all indigenous to the planet which gives us life and sustains us by giving us food, drink, clothing, shelter, medicines, and free space. At our death, our bodies will be embraced by earth as the cycle of life continues.

The 1992 Dublin statement acknowledges the increasing scarcity of water as a result of the different conflicting uses and overuses of water. The four guiding principles recognizes (1) fresh water as finite; (2) all stakeholders should be involved in its management; (3) the importance of women to the safeguarding of water (!); and (4) that water should be recognized as an economic good. #4 has caused some worry among NGO's and human rights activists that the economic value seems to be emphasized over the basic right of all to have access to clean water. In a country where rain is a constant, and where the River Shannon often floods, causing damage to populations who are building on floodplains, fresh water is also becoming increasingly scarce. For example, Dublin is already experiencing water shortages, and water



MELF Cohort 2 on the Tonle Sap River/Lake, August 2022

A Brave and Startling Truth

Maya Angelou
 We, this people, on a small
 and lonely planet
 Traveling through casual
 space...
 To a destination where all
 signs tell us
 It is possible and imperative
 that we learn
 A brave and startling truth
And when we come to it
 To the day of peacemaking...
When we come to it
 We, this people, on this
 wayward floating body...
 Have the power to fashion
 for this earth
 A climate where every man
 and every woman
 Can live freely without
 sanctimonious piety?
 Without crippling fear ?
When we come to it
 We must confess that we are
 the possible
 We are the miraculous, The
 true wonder of this world.
 That is *when*, and *only when*
we come to it.

We are all in this together...

Thank you for participating in this retreat. **How has it impacted you?**

In this time, we are caught between hope and despair. Our earth cries out for us to reverse the destructive path we humans are walking. Prioritizing the world's great rivers is imperative from a spiritual, human, and political perspective.

Failure to listen to the wisdom of indigenous peoples throughout the earth will inevitably lead to more poverty, displacement of peoples, more conflicts and wars, and overall deterioration of life on this planet. In this time of the 6th Great Extinction, may we, by God's grace and our efforts, avoid "planetary hospice." Please watch:

<https://youtu.be/gi3aZLA1tMw> Water Crisis: A Global Problem...

Recognizing We are the Earth.
 To live in harmony with nature is to
 recover harmony with our own
 being, to recognize ourselves as a
 community with human and
 non-human beings, seeking a
 good co-existence with the whole
 territory, our bioregion, our
 ecosystem.

Anita Siufi, RSM

