

**Earth Day Celebration and Native American Awareness Sunday**  
***Music, Scripture and Sermon***  
**April 26, 2009**

The poems are by Carmen Bernos de Gasztold  
translated by Rumer Godden, published in 1962

The Prayer of the Cat sung by Charles Turner  
Lord, I am the cat.  
It is not exactly that I have something to ask of you!  
No - I ask nothing of anyone -  
but, if You have by some chance, in some celestial barn,  
a little white mouse,  
or a saucer of milk,  
I know someone who would relish them.  
Wouldn't you like some day  
to put a curse on the whole race of dogs?  
If so I should say,  
Amen.

Reading from selected verses of Genesis 7:1 – 9:17

The Prayer of the Goldfish sung by Tracy Surette

O God,  
forever I turn in this hard crystal,  
so transparent, yet I can find no way out.  
Lord, deliver me from the cramp of this water  
and these terrifying things I see through it.  
Put me back in the play of your torrents,  
in your limpid springs.  
Let me no longer be a little goldfish  
in its prison of glass,  
but a living spark  
in the gentleness of your reeds.

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The great Catholic writer Ernesto Cardenal in *Abide in Love* observes: "Everything in nature has a trademark, God's trademark: the stripes on a shell and the stripes on a zebra; the grain of the wood and the veins of the dry leaf; the markings on the dragonfly's wings and the pattern of stars on a photographic plate; the panther's coat and the epidermal cells of the lily petal; the structure of atoms and galaxies. All bear God's fingerprints." (from *12 Spiritual Practices to Honor the Earth* by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat)

On this Earth Day Celebration let us contemplate some of God's amazing fingerprints by turning to the wisdom of our Native American sisters and brothers who have always regarded creation as sacred. Their stories often convey truth through the animation of the natural world. Animals speak. Rivers and mountains have feelings. Animate or inanimate objects are believed to have life and spirit and the power to communicate.

In the Cherokee tradition, it has been said "*In ages past, our old ones were the storytellers. This was the way things were passed along to the generations that followed. For this reason the aged people made it a point to remember every detail so they could relate it at a later time. They were the word and picture carriers making history and spiritual values alive and important.*" (from *A Cherokee Feast of Days - Daily Meditations*, Joyce Sequichie Hifler)

So, let's turn to the Native American wise ones and listen to some tales remembering that in our own Hebrew and Christian tradition, these were the very creatures that God loved so much that a covenant was made that never again would they be destroyed.

"Many native traditions held that people could not pray until they had laughed, because laughter opens and frees human beings from rigid preconception.

Everything in nature has a trademark. They all bear God's fingerprints. Theology cannot divorce itself from care of the earth, care of the environment, care of all of earth's creatures. And story telling punctuates the sacredness of every minute detail of God's creation.

The Plains Indian people tell the story of Jumping Mouse. Like Jesus' parables, this story has a lesson to teach. It is a story that helps us humans remember the values of harmony and give away. Listen to excerpts from this marvelous story.

Long ago, Jumping Mouse was given a vision of the sacred mountains. The memory burned in the mind and heart of Jumping Mouse, and one day he went to the edge of the place of mice and looked out onto the prairie. He looked up for eagles. The sky was full of many spots, each one an eagle. But he was determined to go to the sacred mountains. He gathered all of his courage and ran just as fast as he could onto the prairie. His little heart pounded with excitement and fear. He knew that there was great danger in the prairie but he gathered his determination and continued his journey.

The ground was rough. But he arched his tail and ran with all his might. He could feel the shadows of the spots upon his back as he ran. All those spots! Finally he ran into a stand of chokecherries. Jumping Mouse could hardly believe his eyes. It was cool there and very spacious. There was water, cherries, and seeds to eat, grasses to gather for nests, holes to be explored and many, many other busy things to do. And there were a great many things to gather.

He was investigating his new domain when he heard very heavy breathing. He quickly investigated the sound and discovered its source. It was a great mound of hair with black horns. It was a great buffalo. Jumping Mouse could hardly believe the greatness of the being he saw lying there before him. He was so large that Jumping Mouse could have crawled into one of his great horns. "Such a magnificent being," thought Jumping Mouse, and he crept closer.

"Hello, my brother," said the buffalo. "Thank you for visiting me." "Hello Great Being," said Jumping Mouse. "Why are you lying here?" "I am sick and I am dying" the buffalo said. "And my medicine has told me that only the eye of a mouse can heal me. But little brother, there is no such thing as a mouse."

Jumping Mouse was shocked. "One of my eyes!" he thought. "One of my tiny eyes." He scurried back into the stand of chokecherries. But the breathing came harder and slower.

"He will die." Thought Jumping Mouse. "If I do not give him my eye. He is too great a being to let die."

He went back to where the buffalo lay and spoke. "I am a mouse." he said with a shaky voice. "And you, my brother, are a Great Being. I cannot let you die. I have two eyes, so you may have one of them."

The minute he said it, Jumping Mouse's eye flew out of his head and the buffalo was made whole. The buffalo jumped to his feet, shaking Jumping Mouse's whole world.

"Thank you, my little brother," said the buffalo. "I know of your quest for the sacred mountains and of your visit to the River. You have given me life so that I may give-away to the people. I will be your brother forever. Run under my belly and I will take you right to the foot of the sacred mountains, and you need not fear the spots. The eagles cannot see you while you run under me. All they will see will be the back of a buffalo. I am of the prairie and I will fall on you if I try to go up the mountains."

Little mouse ran under the buffalo, secure and hidden from the spots, but with only one eye it was frightening. The buffalo's great hooves shook the whole world each time he took a step. Finally he came to a place and buffalo stopped.

"This is where I must leave you, little brother," said the buffalo.

"Thank you very much," said Jumping Mouse. "But you know, it was very frightening running under you with only one eye. I was constantly in fear of your great earth-shaking hooves."

"Your fear was for nothing," said buffalo, "For my way of walking is the sun dance way, and I always know where my hooves will fall. I now must return to the prairie, my brother, You can always find me there."

Jumping Mouse immediately began to investigate his new surroundings. There were even more things here than in the other places, busier things, and abundance of seeds and other things mice like. In his investigation of these things, Suddenly he ran upon a gray wolf who was sitting there doing absolutely nothing.

"Hello, brother wolf," Jumping Mouse said.

The wolf's ears came alert and his eyes shone. "wolf! wolf! yes, that is what I am, I am a wolf!" But then his mind dimmed again and it was not long before he sat quietly again, completely without memory as to who he was. Each time Jumping Mouse reminded him who he was, he became excited with the news, but soon would forget again.

"Such a great being," thought Jumping Mouse, "but he has no memory."

Jumping Mouse went to the center of his new place and was quiet. He listened for a very long time to the beating of his heart. Then suddenly he made up his mind. He scurried back to where the wolf sat and he spoke.

"Brother wolf," Jumping Mouse said. ....

"Wolf! wolf," said the wolf ....

"Please brother wolf," said Jumping Mouse, "Please listen to me. I know what will heal you. It is one of my eyes. And I want to give it to you. You are a greater being than I. I am only a mouse. Please take it."

When Jumping Mouse stopped speaking his eye flew out of his head and the wolf was made whole.

Tears fell down the cheeks of the wolf, but his little brother could not see them, for now he was blind.

"You are a great brother," said the wolf, "For now I have my memory. But now you are blind. I am the guide into the sacred mountains. I will take you there. There is a great medicine lake there. The most beautiful lake in the world. All the world is reflected there. The people, the lodges of the people, and all the beings of the prairies and skies."

"Please take me there," Jumping Mouse said. The wolf guided him through the pines to the medicine lake. Jumping Mouse drank the water from the lake. The wolf described the beauty to him.

I must leave you here," said wolf, "For I must return so that I may guide others, but I will remain with you as long as you like."

Thank you, my brother," said Jumping Mouse. "But although I am frightened to be alone, I know you must go so that you may show others the way to this place."

Jumping Mouse sat there trembling in fear. It was no use running, for he was blind, but he knew an eagle would find him here. He felt a shadow on his back and heard the sound that eagles make. He braced himself for the shock. And the eagle Hit! Jumping Mouse went to sleep.

Then he woke up. The surprise of being alive was great, but now he could see!

Everything was blurry, but the colors were beautiful.

"I can see! I can see!" said Jumping Mouse over again and again.

A blurry shape came toward Jumping Mouse. Jumping Mouse squinted hard but the shape remained a blur.

"Hello, brother," a voice said. "Do you want some medicine?"

"Some medicine for me?" asked Jumping Mouse. "Yes! Yes!"

"Then crouch down as low as you can," the voice said, "and jump as high as you can."

Jumping Mouse did as he was instructed. He crouched as low as he could and jumped! The wind caught him and carried him higher."

"Do not be afraid," the voice called to him. "Hang on to the wind and trust!"

Jumping Mouse did. He closed his eyes and hung on to the wind and it carried higher and higher. Jumping Mouse opened his eyes and they were clear, and the higher he went the clearer they became. "You have a new name," called the voice. "You are Eagle!"

Learning the practice of Give Away is no easy matter. It requires sacrifice. It teaches us about harmony with all of creation. Ultimately, it transforms our lives. Jesus understood the practice well. Now we, as his followers, have the same opportunity to practice Give Away and to sacrifice whatever it takes to save our planet Earth.

God has promised never again to destroy the earth. But God depends on us to preserve all that has been created. It is impossible to separate our faith from God's creation because everything in this world bears God's fingerprints. Let's listen to the prayer of the Dove and remember that like the Dove, all of creation is Grace Immaculate.

#### The Prayer of the Dove

The Ark waits, Lord,  
the Ark waits on Your will,  
and the sign of your peace.  
I am the dove,  
simple as the sweetness that comes from you.  
The Ark waits, Lord;  
it has endured.  
Let me carry it  
a sprig of hope and joy,  
and put, at the heart of its forsakenness  
this, in which Your love clothes me,  
Grace immaculate.