

By Pat Haggerty

For many of us, summer is a time to take a break, get away, and rejuvenate. We use this time to reconnect with friends and family and to connect with nature. This may mean hiking on a mountain, picnicking in a forest grove, enjoying a campfire on a cool night, or walking the beach at your favorite seashore. Whatever your connection with nature entails, it is sure to bring you closer to the wonders of God.

The other day I was lounging on my beach chair at the New Hampshire shore. I was enjoying watching the waves roll in and seeing the progress of the tides. All of a sudden, I saw a small blob creeping up onto the sand in a kind of "worm-like" fashion. To my amazement, it was a baby seal! Within minutes a small crowd of onlookers had gathered to view this tiny spectacle of nature. In all my years at this beach, I have never seen a baby seal up close and personal.

Certainly no more than 15 minutes had passed, when a woman wearing a fluorescent t-shirt arrived with signs saying "seal resting." She cordoned off a perimeter and placed two signs about 150 feet from the seal. She was part of the Marine Mammal Rescue, as indicated by her shirt. The gathering crowd was very respectful of the seal's space, and the Mammal Rescue volunteer was taking her job very seriously. She kept the designated area free of people and she gave out tidbits of information per individuals' requests. I learned that the seal was a Harbor Seal and probably three months old. Apparently, it is not that unusual for a seal to wander onto the beach for a bit of rest. It can stay on the beach for as long as twenty hours. As it turned out, I must have watched the seal for two hours. It was fascinating! The seal seemed to have a personality of its own as it lifted its head up periodically from napping and peered at the crowd gathered in its sight.

My little experience of seal-watching really made a connection for me with Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*. I have been reading this in-depth encyclical about ecology, our world, and our God. This incident really spoke to me---just as the words of the Encyclical have. Pope Francis turns to his patron Francis in his Encyclical. He says: "Francis [of Assisi] helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. . . That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. . . If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously." (From paragraph 10 of *Laudato Si')*

I wonder how many of those who experienced the little seal on the beach thought of God and his magnificent creations. I wonder how many contemplated the life of the baby seal and how it fit into the grand theme of ecology.

We have all experienced the wonders of God's creation. Let us give Him praise! And, if you haven't read *Laudato Si'*, I encourage you to do so. It will give you a new perspective on our environment and on our responsibility toward preserving it.

