

Seeing Creation through the Eyes of St. Hildegard



Liber Divinorum Operum
Cosmos, Body and Soul (early 13th century)

Using the image above, slowly and thoughtfully work your way through the 5 steps below.

1. Begin by placing yourself in a comfortable position and start with prayer:

Make the Sign of the Cross and pray the Glory Be together:

Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.

Invite the Holy Spirit to be with you and help you be attentive to the presence of God. Pray together:

Holy Spirit, be with us now and fill our hearts, eyes and minds with your love, sight and thoughts, that we may be receptive and open to you.

2. Take a “first look” at the image. What is the first thing that you notice? What jumps out at you right away? Share what you noticed with each other.
3. Pray with the image and St. Hildegard.

Read: Hildegard understands that humanity, represented by the people, is at the heart of creation because humanity is made in the image of God. Just as we see all God’s creatures and creation with our bodily eyes, so , too, can those who have faith see God in all of creation.

St. Hildegard says: “Humanity stands at the center of the world, for it is more important than the rest of the creatures who are dependent on the world. Though small in stature, humankind is great in the strength of its soul.”

Read: St. Hildegard called the natural world the “macrocosm” and each human a “microcosm.” What we see happen outside in the world, on a large scale, also takes place within each of us, on an individual level. For example, the center of creation is made of 4 elements – fire, water, earth and air. (These are the 4 pie shapes in the center.) Each of these elements is necessary and good, and all four elements should be balanced with each other to create heavenly harmony. When one element is allowed control over the others, chaos and destruction occurs.

Reflect: Fire: The element of fire was created for warmth and light, yet it can be devastating when it is out of control. In the natural world, do we ever see fire raging out of control? What are the effects those fires have on the people around them? In the person, fire corresponds to passions that are out of control. These uncontrolled passions take the form of anger, violence and jealousy. Have you ever felt yourself to be “on fire?”

Continue to reflect on the 3 other elements:

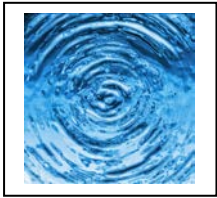




Earth: The earth was created to be nurturing and life-giving, bearing fruit and sustaining life. When this element is not disciplined in the person, it can result in “stoniness and great hardness of heart, causing life to wither.” Are you a person who is generous, life-giving and life-supporting, or do you tend to have an excess of earth, and be stubborn and hard?



Air: In the natural world, a gentle breeze is a beautiful thing. It refreshes, inspires and uplifts. It can also be helpful in work, by driving boats and windmills forward. But when it is excessive, like in a tornado or hurricane, the air causes great harm. In a person, air represents the impulse to lift our thoughts and hearts to God. Through prayer, we seek to be united to him and gain the clarity and insight to do God’s will on earth in our work. However, Hildegard writes that a person who is overcome by too much air cannot make a decision and is pushed and pulled by any thought, like a leaf in the wind. Are you a person who looks up often, to seek the Lord? Or are you frightened and blown about by the wind?



Water: Water is necessary for life and growth. It cleanses and refreshes and brings about new life. Yet too much water can destroy, as in floods, and too little water can kill, as in droughts. Water in the person is a reference to Baptism, where we receive new life in Christ, are cleansed from original sin and are refreshed by being made part of the family of God. Yet our Baptism can suffer a sort of “death” if we do not return to the Living Fountain, Jesus Christ, to refresh ourselves. Do we try to live out our Baptismal Promises in our daily life? Or do we try to survive on too little of the Living Water?



Through the life cycle of each person (represented by the different ages of the man in the image) as well as the four seasons (represented by the different trees) we are each called to balance these temperaments within ourselves, despite the trials and tribulations that may take place (represented by the various animals around the circle).

St. Hildegard connected this image with the Book of Job, a just man who suffered greatly but refused to give up his faith. Ponder this line from Job, and sit with it a few minutes:

Job 17:9 (NLT) - *The righteous keep moving forward, and those with clean hands become stronger and stronger.*

4. Look at the image once more. Does anything else strike you?

5. End with St. Hildegard:

St. Hildegard often described the Holy Trinity as a fire that was outside, above and enveloping the entire created world. She wrote “just as there are three qualities of a flame, so the one God is in Three Persons. The flame consists of fiery light, radiant heat and the flame itself, in red vigor. The Father is the brilliant light, in that he sends his brightness to the faithful. The Son is shown in the red flame itself, as he was born of the Virgin Mary. In the fiery heat, perceive the Holy Spirit, who burns fire in the minds of the believers.” St. Hildegard described the Holy Spirit as the life-giving energy at the root of all creation, who is found in the earth, the sun, the moon and the stars.

“I am the great and fiery energy.
I have kindled every living spark.
I have determined the cosmos
With my upper wings, that is, Wisdom.
I am the fiery life of divinity.
I blaze above the beautiful fields.
I shine in the water.
I burn in the sun, the moon and the stars.”

Make the sign of the cross.