Prayer-Reflection Guide
Janet Erskine Stuart RSCJ
(Superior General 1911-1914)

*"I sought God everywhere in His creatures. He seemed to me to be
in the heart of creation, drawing all things to him."*

Janet was brought up in the green fields and woods of England, allowed to roam on her own, at one with nature and the wildlife around her, watching, observing, breathing it all in. At the same time at home and further afield, she questioned it all, especially after the challenge of her brother, "What is your telos?"

"Spirit seeking light and beauty,
Heart that longest for thy rest,
Soul that askest understanding,
Only thus can ye be blest.

All the joy and all the fairness
Fade away from earth's delight
By the steadfast contemplation
Of the glory out of sight.

Through the vastness of creation
Though your restless thought may roam,
God is all that you can long for,
God is all His creature's home.

Taste and see Him, feel and hear Him,
Hope and clasp His unseen hand;
Though the darkness seem to hide Him,
Faith and love can understand."

Song of the Swan from "*The Ugly Duckling*"
from Poems & Highways and Byways

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Prayer did not always come easy to her in those and at other times in her life, and perhaps for us too, as we face all the challenges of our troubled world today, we might take heart in these words of conviction:

"I know that when the stress has grown too strong
Thou wilt be there
I know that when the waiting seems so long
Thou hearest prayer,
I know that through the crash of falling worlds
Thou holdest me,
I know that life and death and all are Thine
Eternally."

"His appearance shall be sweet" from Poems

How would Janet have responded to the crises of today? What would be her response to the call of the JPIC Imperatives? What would be her responses be to the cry of Laudato Si?

> *"This sister [the earth] now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her."* Laudato Si #2

> *"Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day."* Laudato Si #25

> *"The Spirit of Life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with God. Discovering this presence leads us to cultivate the ecological virtues."* Laudato Si' # 88

Given her passion for God's creation, her educational vision, her readiness to criticize governments and her intellectual capacity to put forward powerful arguments, we may be able to imagine several routes she might take.

Pause for a moment to consider how we educate ourselves and others for the great challenges within the imperatives: our relationship with power, our commitment to advocacy, to our common home and to people on the move.

"No one can be educated by maxim and precept; it is the life lived, and the things loved, and the ideals believed in, by which we tell, one upon another."

The Education of Catholic Girls 1911

Maud Monahan RSCJ, in her biography, wrote of Janet's admiration for these verses of the poet, Wordsworth, which state that there is education and teaching to be had in nature.

> *"His daily teachers had been woods and rills,*
> *The silence that is in the starry sky,*
> *The sleep that is among the lonely hills…*
> *Listen, ponder, hold them dear.*
> *For of God, of God they are…."*

From *Brougham Castle* by William Wordsworth

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Janet herself wrote, *"These in their songs and in their silences first take in hand the child… These give him the hearing ear, the seeing eye, the large horizon of solitude, and the quiet mind which must underlie all true greatness of thought and action."*

As COP26 begins, let us pray in the silence of our hearts for the needs of the world and its future generations.

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> *in the heart of creation, drawing all things to him."*

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