



REVERENCING AND RESTORATION: Caring for Earth

♦ a Lenten Project of the Southeast Portland Vicariate ♦ 1st Sunday of Lent ♦ February 13, 2005 ♦ "Reconciliation with all life" ♦

Ah, into the wilderness. It isn't a journey that we take lightly. A lot of very serious preparations are undertaken; food, bedding, water – we're usually very intentional about such a journey. It's a difficult one and yet as Henry David Thoreau says in *Walden* we seem to know that "we need the tonic of wildness." The wilderness, which is both an interior space as well as an outer space, provides us with an opportunity to stand face to face with our beliefs and values; to know the life that God is calling us to. Such it was for Jesus, and so it is for us during this season of Lent. We step aside from the noise of our lives – if only for awhile – and into the wilderness to reassess our mission to live as Jesus, in right relationship with our Creator and with all of life. We yearn for reconciliation with God present in all life.

Reconciliation. What image comes to your mind when you hear the word reconciliation? Do you think of pleading for forgiveness, embracing another, letting go, trying to change something or feeling peace? The season of Lent is often related to the importance of reconciliation: of reestablishing harmony in our relationships. The basis for reconciliation lies in the recognition of the way things really are. Genuine reconciliation is based on the truth that God is in us and in all: that we are bonded to all that is. When we live out this truth, we are reconciled.¹

God is first described as Creator and the Biblical story of creation is fundamentally a hymn of praise and amazement at the generous outpouring of Love evident in all life. Genesis proclaims God, the source of all life and places the human in the garden of Eden, "to serve and protect life." (*Genesis 2:15*)

Going into the wilderness this Lent, to enter a deeper relationship with God the Loving Creator of *all* challenges each of us to look at how we relate with other humans and with nature.

Reflecting in the wilderness:

- 🌍 Where is my wilderness? Take a few minutes "away" in that space.
- 🌍 God is the Creator of All life. All life radiates the goodness of God. In truth, we are all a part of God, bearing the God life. How does this belief live in me?
- 🌍 Do my actions reflect my deepest held beliefs?
- 🌍 Where do I need to be reconciled within myself and in my relationships?

God, whose vision spans all ages of earth, help us to see beyond this moment and to embrace the wider perspective of your whole creation.

Deliver us from hatred and cruelty; lead us into a way of love and justice that makes room for ALL.

One Earth. In 1948 Sir Fred Hoyle said: "Once a photograph of the Earth, taken from the outside is available - a new idea as powerful as any in history will be let loose."²

Saudi Arabian Astronaut Sultan bin Salman al-Saud, member of an international space crew said: "The first day we all pointed to our own countries. The third day we were pointing to our continents. By the fifth day, we were all aware of only one Earth."³

In the wilderness of space, the vision is clear: **we are one interdependent earth.** What a precious God-given gift and we are "placed in the garden to serve and protect it."

It is sobering to realize that in the midst of knowing how precious Earth is, and how stunning it is that God invites us to care for Earth as our offering back to God our Creator, that we should live in a time marked by the realization that our actions are diminishing the natural world.

We can though, make a difference. Motivated by our faith and informed by the long tradition of Catholic Social Justice Values we can correct our actions and redirect our energies to serve *all* life, in the spirit of Jesus. We can restore balance in our relationship with *Earth* and work to enhance *Earth* as our gift - our great thanksgiving offering - our Eucharist to God our creator.

Guiding Values. Our distinct Catholic heritage offers us a clear perspective on our relationship to the natural world (our environment).

♦ “The whole universe is God’s dwelling...The Christian’s vision is that of a sacramental universe – a world that discloses the Creator’s presence by visible signs...Pope John Paul II has called for Christians to respect and protect the environment so that through nature people can ‘contemplate the mystery of the greatness and love of God.’ ” (*United States Catholic Conference*)

♦ “If you look at the world with a pure heart, you too will see the face of God because it (the world) reveals God’s provident love.” (*Pope John Paul II Address to Youth, World Day of Youth, 14 August, 1993.*)

We live in a sacramental universe - all life radiates God.

♦ “Respect for life, above all for the dignity of the human person also extends to the rest of creation.” (*USCC and PJP II*)

In a sacramental universe, all diverse forms of life reveal God’s glory. The variety in the animal, plant, mineral world is part of God’s plan and therefore invites our respect. “By preserving natural environments, by protecting endangered species, by laboring to make human environments compatible with local ecology, by employing appropriate technology, and by carefully evaluating technological innovations as we adopt them, we exhibit respect for creation and reverence for the Creator.” (*USCC*)

The natural world in all its diversity shares a bit of divine beauty and invites our respect and care. It follows then when we believe that all life reveals God, then we are called to open our hearts and eyes to recognize God and to set our heart and minds on relating to all in a way that supports the God life within the other, and gives opportunity for the other to flourish.

Reflection Process

- 🌍 Where do I see God in the natural world?
- 🌍 How do my actions affect this revelation of God?
- 🌍 Do I need to make a change in my life to ensure the fullest possible manifestation of God in the other?

A Prayer For Global Restoration

Good and Gracious God, Source of all Life, All creation is charged with Your Divine Energy. All creation, each star and every flower, each drop of water and every person, all life reveals your Sacred Mystery. Our minds alone cannot fathom such splendor.

Forgive us, we pray, our ignorance and insecurities which prompt us in arrogance to demand and dominate, and numb us to the destruction we’ve caused.

May we always walk gently upon Earth, in right relationship, nurtured by your Love, taking only what we need, giving back to Earth in gratitude. Sharing what we have, honoring all with reverence, reconciling and healing. Grant us the strength and courage, we pray, for such transformation and reconciliation.

(Adapted from prayer: Pax Christi, USA)

Faith in Action: Caring for Creation

On December 10, 2004, Kenyan environmentalist **Wangari Maathai** received the Nobel Peace Prize for “aiding the continent’s poor with a campaign to plant millions of trees to slow down deforestation.” To date, 30 million trees have been planted in Kenya by the Greenbelt Movement started by Maathai. This work has been primarily done by women.

A Catholic, Maathai was moved by Catholic Social Justice values in her work. For her, the natural world is *more* than a resource to be consumed/used. She recognized that we are called to make a difference and that our life and health are connected to the health of the whole.

In her speech accepting the award, Maathai said: “Today we are faced with a challenge that calls for a shift in our thinking, so that humanity stops threatening its life-support system. We are called to assist *Earth* to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own - indeed, to embrace the whole creation in all its diversity, beauty and wonder. This will happen if we see the need to revive our sense of belonging to a larger family of life.”

Wangari Maathai has invited people all over the world to plant trees at Easter as a symbol of renewal and our commitment to protect the planet. “We could make it a way to say thank you” (to our Creator).

Will your parish consider planting a tree as a constant reminder of our invitation to care for creation?