

Caring for Creation: A call to Ecological Mercy

We Jesuits know we're sinners, who, through God's mercy, have been forgiven and called, just as we are, to promote a faith-that-does-justice. Now, U.S. justice means "fairness" or "equality," and not Biblical Justice, or ***right-relationship***. To ask the Biblically-just-question is to ask: "Is it right that...or is it right to...?" It strives not to do what's right, but the right thing. For a Christian, the right thing is the loving thing.

So we need to ask, "Is it right to pollute the air, our water, or our Mother Earth?" Like Cain asked God when caught having killed Abel: "Am I my brother's keeper?" we ask, "Am I creation's keeper?" God's answer: "if your brother is a fellow human or creation itself, "Yes."

1. St. Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life, and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. "Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs."

2. This sister 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. We have come to see ourselves as (Mother Earth's) lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This's why the earth..., burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she "groans in travail" (*Rom 8:22*).

(Adapted from Pope Francis' *Laudato Si*, Encyclical on the Environment, paragraph's 1 & 2)

"Henry David Thoreau foreshadowed our current ecological crisis, saying our "entitlement mentality" could have apocalyptic consequences when he wrote: "If one walks in the woods for love of it half of each day, one is in danger of being regarded a loafer. But if one spends one's days as a speculator, shearing off those woods and making the earth bald before her time, one is deemed an industrious and enterprising citizen."

(Adapted & paraphrased in an article by Dr. Robin Meyers, Pastor, Mayflower Congregational Church, Okl. City)

He reminds me of Dom Helder Camara, who said, “If I feed the hungry, I am called a saint. If I ask: ‘why is there hunger or poverty,’ I am labelled a communist.” So, although it’s presumptuous of me to say so, I want to stand before you in the spirit of Henry David Thoreau and Dom Helder Camara, by standing with Dr. Robin Meyers, pastor/writer:

“to remind us that of all (their) keenest insights, (their) true genius was to understand that the way a nation loses its soul is when her people, amused and distracted (kept busy with trivia and fed patriotic propaganda), come slowly, but surely to accept the unacceptable...

It was Thoreau, after all, who gave us the essential definition of civil-disobedience, whose lessons were an inspiration to Gandhi: “If the machine of government is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law.” And when he went to jail rather than ... recognize the authority of, the state “which buys and sells (people) like cattle, at the door of its senate house,” he was visited by his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson, who ... said to Thoreau, “Henry, what are you doing in there?” To which Thoreau responded, “Waldo, the question is: what are you doing out there?” (ibid)

I have struggled for justice all my Jesuit life. I have concluded that, in our country, we need to replace the word “justice” with “mercy” in this Year of Mercy. Mercy implies asking the powerful to use their authority to make changes, and to make them because they are the right thing to do. They may not be the profit-able thing to do, but they are the most prophet-able thing to do.

Prophets comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. To be a true Christian, one who recognizes our Baptismal anointing, is to be a prophet, speaking the truth to people in power, to those in authority.

To be prophetic in a country that has ceased listening to the Gospel message of Jesus, the Christ, is to risk being ridiculed or killed. I’d like to

call us, Church and Nation, to be prophetic leaders in a world-gone-mad.

There are 14 indicators identified with countries that were or are, fascist:

- 1) Powerful and continuing nationalism,
- 2) Disdain for the recognition of human rights,
- 3) Identification of enemies and scapegoats as a unifying cause,
- 4) Supremacy of the military,
- 5) Rampant sexism,
- 6) Controlled mass-media,
- 7) Obsession with national security,
- 8) Religion and government intertwined,
- 9) Protection of corporate power,
- 10) Suppression of labor power,
- 11) Disdain for intellectuals and the arts,
- 12) Obsession with crime and punishment,
- 13) Rampant cronyism and corruption, and
- 14) Fraudulent elections.

If we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we would conclude that all 14 are evident in our USA. We lead the world in youth incarcerated for life-without-parole. Our media spews hatred against “enemies” within and without, which really means anyone who disagrees with you (left or right). Social-spending shrinks as Military Spending grows.

Who are our scape-goats? Immigrants, gays, the poor, women, trans-genders, people of color, and anyone working for a more just world. Heaven forbid we hold the crony-like, corrupt corporations, banks, political parties, and trans-national businesses accountable for anything done in the name of national self-interest, or national security.

As I write this homily on Mother’s Day, I would like us all to reflect on what we have done for our Mother, the earth, what we are doing for our Mother, the earth, and what we will do for our Mother, the earth. To repent and believe the Good News is to answer these questions. Let us answer them so that we never have to ask, “Am I creation’s keeper?”