

Caring for Creation: A call to Ecological Mercy

Do you know why we celebrate Mother's Day? We can thank Julia Ward Howe, who in 1870 wrote the following poem.

Arise then...women of this day! Arise, all women who have hearts!
Whether your baptism be of water or tears! Say firmly, "We will not
have questions answered by irrelevant agencies, our husbands will
not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause.
Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have
been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We, the
women of one country, will be too tender of those of another
country to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs.

From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with our
own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm! The sword of murder is not the
balance of justice." Blood does not wipe out dishonor, nor violence
indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil at the
summons of war, let women now leave all that may be left of home
for a great and earnest day of counsel. Let them meet 1st, as women,
to bewail and commemorate the dead. Let them solemnly take
counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human
family can live in peace...each bearing after his own time the sacred
impress, not of Caesar, but of God –

In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask that a
general congress of women without limit of nationality, may be
appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient and the
earliest period consistent with its objects, to promote the alliance of
the different nationalities, the amicable settlement of international
questions, the great and general interests of peace.

Her challenge is as applicable today as it was 146 years ago. If her
poem/letter could effect the change in our national calendar to include
honoring our mothers, so may an effective change come today in our
Pope Francis' call to care, just as earnestly, for our Mother, the Earth. To
quote from *Laudato Sí*, let us be comforted:

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’ve inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We’ve 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)

Pope Francis, in his encyclical, quotes previous popes to make his point and to challenge us to learn, grow, and act. Quoting John Paul II,

“Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us and “take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system.”” [8] JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter [*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*](#) (30 December 1987), 34: AAS 80 (1988), 559.

Quoting Pope Benedict: “(He) urged us to realize that creation is harmed ‘where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property, and we use it for ourselves alone. The misuse of creation begins when we no longer recognize any higher instance than ourselves, when we see nothing else but ourselves.’” [13] [*Address to the Clergy of the Diocese of Bolzano-Bressanone*](#) (6 August 2008): AAS 100 (2008), 634.

This reminds me of a story:

A rabbi is visited by his 3 best students, who want to know what he meant by the spirit of the law. He takes them over to the window in his office, and asks them what they see. One says, “I see the trees, the grass and the sky.” He answered, “That’s right, they are there.” The 2nd says, “I see the lake and the reflections of the clouds.” “Yes, they’re there.” And the 3rd says, “I see a couple kissing.” “Yes, they are there!”

He walks them over to a closet, where there is a full-length mirror. He asks again, “What do you see?” The 3 laugh! One speaks up, “I see myself.” The rabbi says, “Isn’t it interesting. Both a window and a mirror are made of glass. But the moment one is lined by silver, you stop seeing out and you only see yourself.”

How interesting that the conclusion of the story is the same as Pope Benedict, his predecessor's address to priests. Pope Francis wants us all to understand that following Christ involves loving God, above all else, and loving all God's creation, including us, as we have been loved.

He says of Francis of Assisi: "St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He's the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself." (Ibid, *Laudato Si*)

In struggling for justice all my Jesuit life, I've concluded that, in our country, we need to replace the word "justice" with "mercy" in this Year of Mercy. Why? Because justice to most Americans means fairness or equality! Biblical justice means "right relationship." It does not seek doing things right! It seeks doing the right thing. Mercy, too, invites us to do the right thing. It implies asking the powerful to use their authority to make changes, because they are the right thing to do. They may not be the most profit-able, 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 and lives it, is to be a prophet, to speak the truth to those in power with authority.

We need to ask the country and our Church 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 answer them is to live the Beatitudes: let us remember: "blessed are we the merciful, for we shall obtain mercy, and blessed are we the meek and the peacemaker, for we shall see God and be called children of God. And blessed are we who hunger and thirst for justice's sake, for caring for creation. May we rejoice and be glad, for ours is the kingdom of heaven.