

HONORING GOD'S CREATION: FOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

In *The Confessions*, St. Augustine asks the earth and all its inhabitants, the sea, the heaven, the sun, the moon and the stars to "Tell me something about my God". They cried out in a loud voice "He made us".

Our environment, our earthly home, its resources and its inhabitants have inherent value since God created them. Moreover, Scripture tells us that humankind has been entrusted with its care: "The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it". (Genesis 2:15).

How can Christians contribute to the Integrity of Creation in our role as guardians? Pope Francis says we are called to respect and protect each of God's creatures and likewise the environment in which we live.

Is there any connection between the food we eat and our environment- such as eating locally sourced food? It turns out that *what* we eat matters at least as much as *how far* it travels. Raising meat has a huge impact on our environment as evidenced by these findings from the The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' report, "Livestock's Long Shadow":

- Producing a calorie of animal flesh for food requires 20 times as much energy to as the amount needed to produce a calorie of vegetable food
- We wastefully cycle 70 percent of all we grow, such as soy, corn, wheat, and other grains, through animals, rather than eating these foods directly
- More than half of all the water used in the U.S. is used to raise animals for food
- The intensive production of animals for meat requires about 25 times as much land as the production of the same amount of food from vegetable sources
- The 9 billion land animals that we raise for food in the U.S. excrete 130 times as much waste as the entire human population of the United States
- The livestock sector is an even larger contributor to global warming than all forms of transport combined (cars, trucks, airplanes, etc.)

If the current world's population adopted the western diet, we would need three planet earths to sustain our current way of eating. It is already unsustainable. To meet the demands in the USA factory farming is a necessity. Market economics often require inhumane methods of animal agriculture. Pope Benedict said, "Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that hens live so packed together... this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible."

Christian care for the environment has a long history, as shown by this prayer attributed to St Basil (375AD):

*Oh, God, enlarge us with the sense of fellowship with all living things,
our brothers the animals to whom Thou gavest the earth in common with us.*

Pope Francis said "Let us not be closed to the newness that God wants to bring into our lives". Lent is an ideal opportunity to reflect on what we can do personally to help protect the environment. For example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Lenten fast is entirely plant-based.

Greening our plate is one of the leading ways we can protect our planet.

~Tony Clarke, parishioner

More information:

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/a0701e/a0701e00.HTM>

THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION – A CALL TO ACTION

Scientists tell us that our universe originated from a single cataclysmic event 13.8 billion years ago. The superheated gas that resulted cooled gradually over hundreds of thousands years to a point where stars began to form. The continuing evolutionary process eventually brought about other cosmic matter, including the formation of our own planet 4.5 billion years ago. Seven hundred million years later, the earliest forms of life on earth emerged. Now, some 3.8 billion years later, all that we see, all that we humans experience of our life on earth, from animals to vegetation to water to mountains and valleys – literally everything – has been knitted together from a single, creative source by the guiding hand of God. We live within an integrated, ecological system that is, to the eye of the believer, the very face of God.

Indeed, the ancient Israelites, our spiritual ancestors, frequently extolled God's magnificence in creation (Psalm 148). Their scriptures, most notably the psalms, are filled with references to how creation "declares the glory of God" (Psalm 19: 2) and to God's ongoing mastery over creation (Psalm 65: 7-14). Down through the ages people of faith have seen creation not only as the handiwork of God, but more emphatically as the very sacrament of God. English mystic Julian of Norwich declared "the fullness of joy is to behold God in everything." In more recent times, Jesuit poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, began one of his most famous poems thus: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God." God and creation are inextricably bound.

In the book of Genesis, we read that God "looked at everything he had made, and he found it very good" (Genesis 1:31). The author later adds that God assigned Adam "to cultivate and care" for the good earth he had created (Genesis 2:15). This is important because it serves as one of the biblical bases for our responsibility as humans to preserve the integrity of creation as God intended it.

For most of our history, we humans lived in harmony with creation. Until relatively recently we could do little else since we lacked the means to substantially alter nature. But that has all changed. Since the industrial revolution, we have developed capabilities that have all too frequently outstripped our ecological sensibilities and subverted our responsibilities to preserve God's gift to us. We have, to various degrees, polluted our rivers and oceans, poisoned our air, ravaged our rain forests, destroyed species and brought about global warming, which now threatens the very existence of future generations. We have scarred the face of God.

Pope Francis has called upon all people of goodwill to be "protectors of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment" (*Inauguration 3/19/13*). To do this well, we must take seriously the integral nature of creation: that everything and everyone is linked; that what happens with one aspect of creation inevitably affects other aspects. In the human family, for example, decisions and social policies by one group can adversely impact others, especially those of the poor and vulnerable who lack the resources to protect and secure their own interests and needs. What is more, how we think about and engage creation impacts our relationship with God. It can be no other way. Nature in all its forms is how God speaks to us and relates to us. It is through nature, the very stuff of our existence, that we are linked to the divine.

In his letter to the Roman community, St. Paul describes the linkage between creation and our relationship with God, particularly God's saving action. "We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now; and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies" (Romans 8: 22-23). In other words, the destiny of creation is tied to our own spiritual future.

When we say the Lord's Prayer, we ask that God's Kingdom come. This does not refer to heaven replacing earth. It refers to a transformed creation, an earth where justice and love reign and where the natural order reflects God's intended design of balance, harmony and interdependence. As Christians we are called to serve this cause. We are asked to befriend creation, to care for it and to maintain its basic integrity. We should, as St. Ignatius of Loyola advised, pray as if everything depended on God and work as if everything depended on us. God's blessed creation deserves nothing less.

~Neil Parent, parishioner