

I love the ocean, the cadence of the waves, sun on my face, and sand under my feet. It was a wonderful treat for my wife and me to join friends last weekend at their beach house in Kitty Hawk, NC.

Over the past few months, I've learned a lot about environmental issues. The parish Social Justice Committee has focused on Integrity of Creation. I wondered if any of these lessons would come to mind during our ocean visit.



Customarily, when Aleta and I take beach walks, we bring plastic bags. We like to collect shells and pick up beach debris. This time we forgot our bags. Not to worry because just ahead was a giant McDonald's cup, ample size to hold the bottle caps, sandwich bags, cigarette filters, and the plastic bottle we found. Thinking of similar trash that washes into the sea from beaches around the world, I wondered where it all goes. Then I remembered a movie we saw recently. Much marine debris breaks down into smaller pieces and floats around in our oceans for years. Some is forced by ocean currents into vast swirling vortexes of disintegrating ocean trash. The largest, near Hawaii, is known as the North Pacific Garbage Patch and is estimated to be as large as the continental United States.

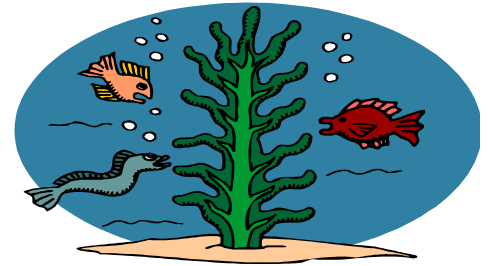
As we walked on, a flock of brown pelicans flew overhead in precise formation. Once endangered because of DDT, this huge bird must now avoid another man-made entrapment. Thousands of birds, turtles, whales and other marine creatures die each year when they ingest plastic bags for food (looks like jellyfish) or eat bits of plastic (mistaken for food). Plastic blocks the digestive system so that real food cannot be processed, causing starvation. Since a plastic bag can take hundreds of years to break down, even after the animal dies, the plastic can be ingested by another animal...a sobering thought.

As we moved along, I spotted a kind of tubular seaweed that reminded me of coral. Many of the ocean's coral reefs, home to 25% of all marine life, are endangered. The world's reefs are already one-quarter gone. Death of coral threatens a complex chain of marine life from thousands of fish species to lobster, jellyfish, and countless other creatures that depend on reef life for food. Since coral reefs have existed for over 50 million years, what is causing the change now? The threat is global warming. Increased carbon dioxide in the air is raising the ocean temperature and increasing acidity. (The ocean absorbs CO₂, which converts into carbonic acid). Scientists believe that our reefs can and must be saved, but only if we reduce man-made stresses on them.

Our beach walk was delightful as always, but more reflective than our walks of the past. I thank God for the glorious gift of the ocean. With my new vision, I can see that there are many fragile elements in the vast ocean life. I can see that all of us must take action to cherish, protect and care for this precious gift.

More About Oceans

Oceans play an essential role in supporting life on earth. Seventy-one per cent of Earth's surface is water. Oceans shape the nature of climate and weather, stabilize temperature, generate most atmospheric oxygen and remove significant amounts of carbon dioxide.



- Fish from the ocean provide forty per cent of the protein consumed by nearly two-thirds of the world's population, yet fish populations are at risk from over-fishing.
- Forty per cent of the people in the world live within 40 miles of the coast. Experts estimate that by 2025 three-fourths of the world population will live in coastal areas.
- Marine transportation accounts for 80% of the world's goods shipped globally and is a significant cause of pollution.
- Beach tourism is a major source of revenue for countries around the world.

Our oceans are vital to global prosperity, but sadly they are in trouble. Human activity is altering the ocean's ecosystem. Climate change, chemical pollution, and over-fishing are major factors. If people of the world work together, they can reverse the decline. As stewards of God's creation we are called to help restore the balance and integrity within this marvelous gift of God's creation. (Adapted from Water Gift of Life, ROW, Religious on Water)

What can we do?

1. **Learn more about ocean and water issues.** Here are some excellent websites: noaa.gov; ocean.nationalgeographic.com; waterobservatory.org; sierraclub.org; oceanconservatory.org
2. **Take Action:** Participate in a creek or river clean-up, pick up litter at the beach, spread the word to others about the dangers of ocean pollution and that every contribution to clean-up helps.
3. **Advocate for clean air and water policies.** Contribute to organizations that protect marine animals and environments. Follow and support legislative efforts that will enhance the health of our oceans and waterways.

Announcing....

The OLQP ECO-FAIR

Sunday, June 1 (After 9:30 & 11:15 Masses)

**Exhibits and practical tips on living as
Integrity of Creation people.**

Plan to attend!