

## HOMILY FOR THE WORLD DAY OF PRAYER FOR THE CARE OF CREATION

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- ❖ As you may know there are two different accounts of the creation in the book of Genesis.
  - Chapter one describes God creating the universe and all that is in it in 7 days.
  - Chapter two focuses much more on God creating the first man out of the dust of the earth.
    - And then, when the man discovers he is alone in the world, God creates the first woman from Adam's rib.
  - In chapter 1, God tells our first parents that they should "Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it."
    - That language – subdue the earth – sounds harsh.
      - Actually, the authority to subdue belonged to a king.
      - Genesis is saying that every human being has royal dignity.
        - ◆ It seems to suggest that humans, because they are created in God's image, have authority over the rest of creation.
        - ◆ However, like later Jewish Kings, they were expected to exercise that dominion in conformity with God's will.
    - Chapter 2, which we heard this morning, uses different imagery and nuances our relationship with creation:
      - The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.
      - This suggests that the dominion we have over the world is to be exercised for the good of creation.
        - Like a royal gardener, we are use our strength, our intellect to care for creation.
  - ❖ For tens of thousands of years, humanity seemed to have little overall impact on creation.
    - The smoke from a campfire or even a village would quickly dissipate in the wind.
    - Our ancestors may have been careless in disposing of their garbage or broken utensils, but most of that trash quickly decomposed and returned to its elemental stage.

- ❖ However, with the growth of cities, and especially in the past several hundred years with the advent of the industrial revolution, our power to impact our environment has grown exponentially.
  - We have been able to tear down mountains and change the courses of rivers.
  - Smoke stacks of factories and exhaust pipes of cars have dumped millions of tons of pollution in the air.
  - For centuries we considered rivers to be sewers where we could dump sewage, chemicals, run-off from mega-farms and trash ranging from toilet seats to old cars.
  - The plastics that have become so much a part of our lives manage to end up in the oceans where they create vast floating trash heaps or kill fish and other marine animals.
- ❖ Clearly this was not what God had in mind when he told Adam to “fill the earth and subdue it.”
  - Over the past 200 years and more recently since the middle of the last century, there has been a growing awareness of human need and human responsibility to protect the fragile ecology of our planet.
  - We have begun to see soil, water and air as vulnerable and in need of our protection.
  - At the same time we began to realize the depth of the challenges involved in caring for and protecting our planet, the common home that our God has given to all his Children.
    - Some forms of pollution can take centuries, even millennia to degrade.
    - There are strong economic and social forces that resist any efforts that might impede profits, comfort or what is perceived to be progress.
    - There is also recognition that much of the ecological damage is a result of people living in desperate poverty, trying simply to survive.
      - Much of the destruction of the Amazon that we are all too aware of is caused by poor people simply trying to make a living.
      - Responsible care for our planet has to include ways for all our brothers and sisters to better their lives without destroying their universe.
- ❖ These are a mighty challenges, but God our creator has given us humans the tools we need to meet them – if only we make proper use of them.

- God has given us intellect.
  - Science and technology can be the source of pollution, but they can also point to ways of dealing with it – if we make it worthwhile to do so.
- Together with our intelligence, God has given us wisdom, a much more important tool.
  - We need people who can weigh consequences, seen and unforeseen, who can sound the alert before disaster strikes.
  - And, perhaps even more difficult, all of us need to pay attention to the prophets who point out looming environmental disasters resulting from our carelessness.
- God has given us a sense of justice, of recognizing that the earth belongs to all of humanity, not just those of us who are well-off or who have the power and technology to do what we want.
  - But while we humans may have an innate sense of justice, we have to be careful not to let our own greed and self-centeredness blunt it.
- God has given us the ability to make a commitment, to see a project through.
  - Our current ecological disasters have been centuries in the making and rarely will there be an effective quick fix.
  - But we can see examples of long-term solutions.
    - I grew up in Cleveland where the Cuyahoga River was so polluted that it, the river, has caught fire at least 13 times, most recently in 1969.
      - ◆ But this year, the American Rivers conservation association named the Cuyahoga "River of the Year" in honor of "50 years of environmental resurgence.
    - Closer to home in 1965 President Lyndon Johnson was so disgusted with the pollution in the Potomac that he declared it a national disgrace.
      - ◆ We know that for decades swimming has been prohibited in the metropolitan section of the river.
      - ◆ But this year river health earned a grade of B- and there is hope that by 2025 it will actually be clean enough to swim in.

- These are hopeful signs, but also reminders of the depth of commitment required to protect our environment.
  - It takes effort, it takes sacrifice and frankly it takes a financial commitment as well.
  - Too often destruction of our environment occurs because it is the easiest and cheapest way to make a profit.
- ❖ As Pope Francis reminded us in his encyclical *Laudato Si*, God has commissioned us, his children to cultivate and care for our common home, the world that God gave us.
  - As individuals, as a society, as a world, it is our responsibility to leave a healthier world for our descendants than the one that was left to us.
  - May the lord give us intelligence, the wisdom, the justice, and the commitment to be the stewards of creation he wants us to be.
  - So that we may have and leave the world in the condition the Lord intended it to be.