

## Day 227 – Monday, Nov 2 - The Environment

A comment from Fr. Jim. I realize that this musing is a little long, but it will be worth it.

Late breaking news – It has come to my attention that the Pope has added an eighth work of mercy “Care of the environment.”

Before I give you the official news (which is 4 years old). I would like to reveal something Bishop Don Bolen said, when he was giving a tour of the new cathedral in Saskatoon, and was talking about the stain glass windows. The last window, the largest, is based on the line from the Book of Revelation, “And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” (Rev 21:5) He made a point of saying, “It does not say, ‘I will make all new things,’ it says, ‘I will make all things new.’” St. Paul echoes this when he says,

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rm 8:18-23)

For centuries we have put man at the center of creation. Recognizing that the whole of the cosmos will be redeemed puts a new slant on the environment.

VATICAN CITY (September 1, 2016) -- Pope Francis on Thursday proposed that caring for the environment be added to the traditional seven works of mercy that Christians are called to perform, taking his green agenda to a new level by supplementing Jesus' Gospel call to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and visit the sick. Francis made the ambitious proposal in a message to mark the church's World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, which he instituted last year in a bid to highlight his ecological concerns. Officials said the call was the logical extension of Francis' landmark and controversial ecological encyclical issued last year. In it, the world's first Latin American pope called for a revolution to correct what he said was a "structurally perverse" economic system in which the rich have exploited the poor and turned the Earth into an "immense pile of filth."

This year, the Sept. 1 day of prayer for the planet falls during Francis' Holy Year of Mercy, a yearlong focus on the church's merciful side. Throughout the year, the faithful have been urged to practice the seven corporal and seven spiritual works of mercy, which were first outlined in the Gospel and have been articulated over centuries by philosophers and theologians. In addition to the corporal acts of mercy, the spiritual ones include counselling the doubtful, instructing the ignorant and praying to God for the living and dead.

In the message, Francis said the faithful should use the holy year to ask forgiveness for the "sins" against the environment that have been committed by the "irresponsible, selfish" and profit-motivated economic and political system. He called for all of humanity to take concrete steps to change course, starting with repaying what he called the "ecological debt" that wealthy countries owe the poor.

"Repaying (the debt) would require treating the environments of poorer nations with care and providing the financial resources and technical assistance needed to help them deal with climate change and promote sustainable development," he wrote. On a smaller, individual scale, recycling, turning off the lights and carpooling can also help, he said. Finally, he proposed that caring for the environment be added as a "complement" to the seven spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

"This message is the next logical step after (the encyclical), for it is showing us how to internalize its teaching in our lives and in our world," said Cardinal Peter Turkson, who helped draft the original encyclical and is Francis' point man on environmental matters. Turkson on Wednesday was also appointed to head the Vatican's new super-dicastery responsible for the environment, migration, health care and peace and justice

matters, issues that are all closest to Francis' heart. Terrence Ward, author of the book "The Guardian of Mercy" and a panellist at the Vatican launch of the new document, said the works of mercy Francis is asking people to perform are "not about changing the world tomorrow." Rather, they're about changing mindsets and performing even small actions -- such as turning off the lights. Doing so, he said, shows reverence for the miracle of life and creation and actually allows for all the other works of mercy to follow. "To give polluted water to someone who is thirsty doesn't make sense," he said. "Clean the water up first."

Perhaps this reflection on St. Francis is a good accompaniment for this day.

In stories of his life, Francis is quoted as talking to animals and natural elements. He does not speak to them just as birds or wolves, but as mutual spiritual beings who are worthy of being addressed. He was always telling them who they are, why they should be happy, and why they make him happy. He said they give glory to God just by being who they are! One of his early biographers wrote, "We who were with him saw him always in such joy, inwardly and outwardly, over all creatures, touching and looking at them, so that it seemed that his spirit was no longer on earth but in heaven." That may sound sentimental to our modern ears, but perhaps that is what a saint looks like—completely attuned to God's presence everywhere and at all times.

So-called "nature mysticism" was in fact a worthy first path for Francis, and also for Bonaventure, the scholar who brought the vision of Francis and Clare to the level of a total theology, philosophy, and worldview. Bonaventure saw all things as *likenesses* of God (*vestigia Dei*), fingerprints and footprints that reveal the divine DNA underlying all the links in the Great Chain of Being. Both Francis and Bonaventure laid the foundation for what John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) would later identify as the *univocity* (one voice) of all being, and what Dawn Nothwehr, a Franciscan sister, calls "cosmic mutuality."

*In the light of eternity, we're here for a very short time, really. We're here for one thing, ultimately: to learn how to love, because God is love. - James Finley*

Sincerely,  
Fr. Jim Kaptein