

## World Day of Prayer for Creation: 1 September 2020

### Celebrating the day of Creation is in fact to do honour to the Creator

#### NB:

1. *Footnotes have been incorporated into this text. This has been done mainly to stimulate further reading.*
2. *For Parishes with Audio-Visual possibilities, the YouTube feature of Severn Suzuki's presentation (cf. Footnote #2) can be used to make greater impact.*

#### Introduction

My mother was a very creative person and from the time we were children, we saw her knit jerseys as winter approached. She used the good old knitting needles and we became used to wearing homemade jerseys right until adulthood. We watched her in the evenings as she started counting stitches off on the needles and then rapidly going through the motions. She would measure out the work against us and then would shape the garments to suit us. Sometimes she would include some sort of pattern which made the jersey unique. I remember several years ago giving a "mother-made" pullover to the ladies of the Parish at Estcourt for their sale to raise funds. One of the ladies – herself a craftswoman, seeing the superior craft of my mother asked who had made the garment. I told her it was my mother who had since died. She tried to talk me out of giving it away but I persisted and walked away without the jersey. The next day the lady approached me with the pullover which she had bought. She gave it back to me saying that there was something of my mother in every stitch of that pullover. She knew what a mother's love was all about. She convinced me and I still have that pullover in my cupboard.

#### Application

The theme of creation abounds in the readings chosen for today. Each time it refers to the personal involvement of the Creator who leaves his fingerprints on creation in the same way that there was something of my mother in every stitch of the garments she had made. There is something of the creator in all of creation. In fact if we look at the term for "creating in his own image" we will be able to conclude that there is some of God's DNA in each of us<sup>1</sup>. The consequence of this gift of being created in the divine image is that humanity has dominion over all of creation. This is the task assigned to humanity in the text. But sadly, our dominion over creation has been counterproductive.

#### Comment

Recent decades have witnessed one sad lament after another as creation itself has been massacred. A cursory look at National Geographic documentaries is enough to make one weep. It costs the Earth to sustain us and we have choked it with plastic and other non biodegradable substances. Over the years some have even cluttered it with land mines causing injury and death. Recent findings of whales and turtles suffering devastating consequences of having ingested plastic waste recklessly cast into the oceans by careless human beings ought to cause us to seriously mourn. Recently National Geographic revealed that in the last thirty years fifty percent of Australia's coral reefs have been depleted. This has a direct bearing on the food supply to millions of people who eke out a living from the sea. Yes! it is time to awaken from our slumber (Rm 13:11). The time for denial is over.

The last few decades have sounded the alarm against such issues as global warming and the general destruction of the biosphere but these warnings have fallen on deaf ears as the consumerist agenda brazenly marches forward. Recently the world has been stunned by the Swedish teenager Greta Thurnberg as she generated an acute awareness of the massacre of creation. But this is not new. In 1992 a 12 year old Canadian girl stopped the world for five minutes when she made an appeal to the

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<sup>1</sup> Those who are interested might want to refer to the commentary on Genesis by von Rad and look at his explanation of the two words for "image" in the Hebrew Bible.

United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro<sup>2</sup>. Her speech is still highly relevant 28 years later and ought to be listened to and shared with young people in our parishes. The future is largely in their hands and we owe it to them to empower them. This is the least we can do as the environment we leave them is not something we can be proud of.

How is it that we, as spokespersons for the Gospel, have remained silent in the face of the great trauma which the earth continues to suffer? Have we not heard the “groaning” of creation (Rm 8:22)? Have we not seen the ecology as needing to be embraced by our faith? Our silence makes us complicit because we are the designated stewards of creation. Earth groans as she suffers deforestation, global warming, and the wholesale destruction of her biomechanics by which she sustains us.

Perhaps we have focussed so much on the transcendence of God in our liturgical worship that we have forgotten that we have an incarnational spirituality<sup>3</sup>. We have forgotten to embrace the earth<sup>4</sup> and have ignored the essential complementary nature of worship and the ecology<sup>5</sup>. The fact that God formed humanity out of the dust of the earth (Gn 2:7) is not to be taken lightly. We are born of the earth and have an inextricable unity with the earth. To neglect the earth is to neglect ourselves. Our liturgical services and preaching ought to take the earth’s trauma into account. We need to incorporate intercessory prayers for the ecology and an awareness of our responsibility to care for the earth in our liturgies, our catechesis, and our parish evangelizing programmes. But how do we start?

As strange as it sounds we need to start by mourning. In a June 2018 article Fr Rolheiser OMI presents our disdain for mourning in these words: “Our culture doesn’t give us easy permission to mourn. Its underlying ethos is that we move on quickly from loss and hurt, keep our griefs quiet, remain strong always, and get on with life”. Then commenting on the necessity of mourning he sees the process as “something that’s vital to our health, something we owe to ourselves. Without mourning our only choice is to grow hard and bitter in the face of disappointment, rejection, and loss. And these will always make themselves felt”<sup>6</sup>.

We ought to seriously consider the necessity of mourning our present loss of the earth’s fertility and abundance. We need to sing our lament as it is only through lamentation that we can articulate our grief and sense of loss as earth continues to groan. But mourning the devastation of the ecology is not an end in itself. It is done with our liberation in mind. We lament the loss of the earth’s original goodness (“and God saw that it was good” is a constant refrain in the creation narrative in Genesis 1) and also expect the breaking in of a new world as we demonstrate faith in the word of God: “Behold I make all things new” (Is 65:17; Rev 21:5). So whilst we criticise through our pathos, our mourning and our lament; we also energize with our songs of hope and with our prophetic action on the side of the inherent goodness of the ecology<sup>7</sup>. When we do this then we give full meaning to the prayer of the Church as expressed in the Preface of the fourth Eucharistic Prayer: “... we, too, confess your name in exultation, giving voice to every creature under heaven, as we acclaim: Holy, Holy, Holy Lord ...”

**Suggested Hymn:** *All creatures of our God and King*

**Suggested Action:** Incorporate the Integrity of Creation into existing Parish J & P portfolios; or start a new Environmental Awareness Group.

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<sup>2</sup> This speech is still very relevant today and can be accessed on the following site: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/severnsuzukiunearthsummit.htm> (accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020).

<sup>3</sup> David Power OMI has an interesting article called “Worship and Ecology” in *Worship* 84(4).

<sup>4</sup> An internet search for Hinduism’s attitudes towards the environment ought to be interesting. That religion includes such aspects as our duty towards the environment, simplicity of lifestyle so as to sustain the environment, and many such common-sense practices.

<sup>5</sup> Sr. Linda Gibler’s “From the Beginning to Baptism” offers extremely important insights showing the inextricable link between worship and created elements.

<sup>6</sup> The full article is available on [http://lifeissues.net/writers/ron/ron\\_869mourning.html](http://lifeissues.net/writers/ron/ron_869mourning.html) (accessed on 26<sup>th</sup> June 2020).

<sup>7</sup> For those interested in the notion of criticising and energising, the work by Walter Brueggemann entitled “*The Prophetic Imagination*” is highly recommended.