

Earth Day 2019

Theme: Protect Species

Introduction:

This year marks the 49th anniversary of Earth Day. The theme this year is a call for humanity to protect **endangered** species. All species are our relatives and they are suffering extinction at a rapid rate.

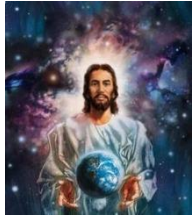
On this Earth Day we are invited to deepen our understanding of the urgent need for the protection of the biodiversity of species and to truly express our appreciation for the valuable role played by the different species in creation. **For the most part**, Earth's species are very closely linked to the production of food, water, and clean air, the control of climate and disease, and **as well** to our own spiritual well being. For, as Thomas Aquinas reminds us, all the diversity of species is needed in all their variety, not just for their usefulness, but because all were created to show us some aspect of who our Creator God is for us.

As Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans we have had the experience of how great a loss it was to us when we learned of the depletion of the cod stocks and the subsequent moratorium on the cod fishery. Sadly, the way of life on which Newfoundlanders and Labradoreans had depended for centuries was decimated. The shock of this reality "shook us all to the bone" but especially so for the inshore fishermen who were to suffer the greatest loss. It was difficult to understand that with their limited capacity in the use of just hook and line and their trawls to take only the fish they needed for their livelihood they would be the ones who were to be most affected while the factory trawlers were free to continue the fishery. The gloomy and unexpected news of the urgency to immediately begin a moratorium to allow the cod stocks to grow and multiply was devastating for them.

We now realize more than ever before the harm that we human beings are inflicting on the other than human species of Earth. In an interconnected and interrelated world we are once again becoming more aware of our intimate connection with creation and also that creation itself is part of us. No one person or species stands alone. We are all one. Like humanity, all non-human species have an intrinsic value and a special purpose. Humans are so intimately connected to the natural world that without Earth's non-human species, plants, animals, air, soil and water, we could not survive. Does this not cause us to marvel and to stand in awe at who we are as part of this great mystery where even a worm or a bug is a relative of ours? Every creature, large or tiny, has its own motivation to continually enhance the continuation of its life in a way that connects its purpose to humanity. Does this not cause a sense of gratitude to well-up in us as we ponder this integral connection and the integrity and biodiversity of this valuable life? With these deep thoughts do we not feel compelled in some profound way to care for the species of the natural world as they care for us? Is it not also our obligation as eco-citizens to come together to work for a sustainable future for all species and especially for our non-human relatives who are most endangered and most vulnerable?

Let us then with these thoughts begin our Prayer Service which is taken in part from Catholic Climate Covenant Earth Day 2019.

Opening Prayer: Loving God, through the death and resurrection of Christ you have made a



way to heal the brokenness of this world. You have provided within us the energy and passion to help care for creation. Continue to pour out upon us the Spirit of wisdom, love, courage and hope as we face the challenges needed as your engaged co-creators in sharing your creative love for the care and protection of the most endangered and vulnerable species of this Earth. Grant us joy and peace so that filled with your presence we will journey together in faith with a shared mission to love and care for a hurting world. Renew in us a vision for creation that reflects your sacredness and glory. For all species, we pray in your precious name, our God and Creator of all, through your Son and our brother, Jesus Christ. Amen

Reading 1:

“The world is facing a mass extinction of species. All species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, arthropods (insects and arachnids), fish, crustaceans, corals and other cnidarians, and plants have declined, in many cases severely. Human civilization has had a negative impact on most living things. We are amidst the largest period of species extinction in the last 60 million years. Normally, between one and five species will go extinct annually. However, scientists estimate that we are now losing species at 1,000 to 10,000 times the normal rate, with multiple extinctions daily. Habitat destruction, exploitation, and climate change are driving the loss of half of the world’s wild animal population.”— Earth Day Network Global Species Decline Factsheet

All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, we come before you in grief, in shame to lament the loss of beautiful creatures.

Reading 2:

“It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential “resources” to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost forever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right,” — *Laudato Si'* 33



All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, forgive us for our disrespect to those creatures of our God.

Reading 3:

“Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: ‘And God saw that it was good’. By the very nature of creation



material being is endowed with its own stability, truth and excellence, its own order and laws. Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Humans must

therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.” — Catechism of the Catholic Church, 339

All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, forgive us for not recognizing your beauty and your goodness in these creatures.

Reading 4:

“The ecological age fosters deep awareness of the sacred presence within each reality of the universe. There is an awe and reverence due to the seas and the continents; to all living forms



of trees and flowers; to the myriad expressions of life in the sea; to the animals of the forests and the birds of the air. To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice.”

Thomas Berry, [The Dream of the Earth](#)

All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, forgive us for our part in the death of healthy ecosystems and the resulting extinction of your creatures.

Reading 5:

“...creation...is almost like another sacred book whose letters are represented by the multitude of creatures present in the universe.”

— Pope John Paul II, General Audience, Jan. 30 2002



All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, help us to read you in the voices of the natural world.

NL Pine Martin

Reading 6:

“To follow Jesus is to be a wholemaker, essentially to love the world into new being and life.”

—Sr. Iliia Delio, [Making All Things New: Catholicity, Cosmology, Consciousness](#)



All: God of all Creation, Maker of Heaven and Earth, help us to be wholemakers.

Reflection questions to ponder and possibly to share our response with family or friends:

- 1) Which reading most impacted you? Why?
- 2) What are some religious-ethical responsibilities for protecting biodiversity and endangered species?
- 3) Sr. Ilia Delio tells us that “To follow Jesus is to be a wholemaker, essentially to love the world into new being and life.” Do you see your ministry of creation care as part of making the world whole and bringing the world to new being and new life?
- 4) How is protecting biodiversity a way to follow Christ?

Prayers of Intercession:

Leader: Creator God, we pray for our brothers and sisters of the air: chickadees, cardinals, blue jays, owls, crows, seagulls...

All: Give us a sign through them to decrease the pollution in the air we breathe. Creator God, let us pray.

L: Creator God, we pray for our brothers and sisters of water: shellfish, algae, salmon, trout, frogs...

All: Awaken our compassion at the sight of their wounds so that we cease polluting the water, Creator God, let us pray.

L: Creator God, we pray for our brothers and sisters of Earth: squirrels, deer, maples, the pine trees, the tomato plants and the worms...

All: May their humility and simplicity inspire us to live according to your will, Creator God, let us pray.

L: Creator God, we pray for the world’s leaders and policymakers, for mayors, governors, and presidents of countries and of companies.

All: May they hear the call from God through other creatures and make sustainable, wise decisions, Creator God, let us pray.

L: Creator God, we pray for our community.

All: We ask you give us the courage to act regarding our environment and not to succumb to the temptation of wasting, Creator God, let us pray.

—Adapted from Prayer by the Green Church Project, Montréal, Canada

Closing Prayer:

Refresh our love for all you have made. Renew our resolve to advocate, fight, nurture and defend our fellow creatures. Thank you for those who care for Earth - the gardeners, the activists, the scientists, the zoologists - sustain them and protect their hearts as they strive and grieve.

We thank you for the magnificent world which you have bestowed upon us. We thank you that you can do more than all we ask or imagine and so we ask for your help - restrain human evil, energize us for service, fill us with courage and hope. Amen

--- adapted from Earth Day Prayer Catholic Covenant.

MAY WE LEARN

by John O'Donohue



Nearer to the earth's heart,
Deeper within its silence:
Animals know this world
In a way we never will.

Stranded between time
Gone and time emerging,
We manage seldom
To be where we are:
Whereas they are always
Looking out from
The here and now.

May we learn to return
And rest in the beauty
Of animal being,

Learn to lean low,
Leave our locked minds,
And with freed senses
Feel the earth
Breathing with us.

May we learn to walk
Upon the earth
With all their confidence
And clear-eyed stillness

So that our minds
Might be baptized
In the name of the wind
And the light and the rain.