



A Breath of Fresh Air

Blessings to you all on this chilly, but bright day!

Today, Wednesday, April 22, is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. It is, of course, not at all like any of the past, as hundreds of millions of earth's citizens have been ordered to stay home. The earth, due to the pandemic, is essentially closed. There are no public gatherings, rallies, celebrations or demonstrations. The wild and beautiful places many venture to are locked down.

Perhaps the isolation of the pandemic presents us an opportunity to rediscover the beauty and wonder of God's creation. The old phrase, "Stop and smell the roses" may be appropriate, even though the rose blooms are weeks away and there were snow flurries this morning.

We don't need to take a field trip to visit a nature preserve, state park, or wildlife refuge to reconnect with nature, it's all around us. Indeed as we read in Psalms, "The heavens and the earth proclaim the glory of God".

Maybe today, on this "Earth Day", we could unplug and turn off all our electronic devices that are constantly bombarding us with much too much negative, non-productive, and useless information, and instead look and listen to what God says to us through His glorious creation. Who needs a museum when we realize, as Dante Alighieri wrote, "Nature is the Art of God".

I love nature, I've always found great peace and enjoyment in it. In many ways, God has used it as my saving grace, a refuge in the midst of all of my life's storms. I suppose I attribute my lifelong love of God's creation to my father and grandfather. They were environmentalists long before the term was ever used.

Every Sunday after Mass, my father took my brothers and me out into wild places where we would hike, explore, fish, track animals, forage wild berries, and dig mushrooms. He would award a "prize" to whomever could name the most types of trees, or identify the bird singing, or animal tracks. I'd always win the tree id, but usually lose the foot race or swim back to the car. I never wanted to leave those wild and beautiful places where I felt so close to God. My grandfather who had a farm taught me much about the rhythms, cycles, and seasons of nature, its beauty and harmony with God.

It was no doubt this type of childhood which planted the seeds for my own Thoreau like sojourn living 'off grid' in a rustic cabin on a mountain in Vermont. I was always aware, as is written in Psalm 24:1, that, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof".

I have also realized that although we live upon this earth, it is not ours, it is the Lord's, and we have been placed here to enjoy it and to be good stewards of it. Indeed as people of faith, we have long known it is a sacred trust to be its caretakers. Nature, all of it, points to its creator, our God. Creation care is first and foremost a Christian's obligation .

The closures of so much of our world due to the pandemic is resulting in some significant and beneficial environmental effects. It's a quieter world; it's becoming, in some places, a cleaner world. The Himalayas are visible from parts of India, which for decades, have been obscured by smog. Some waterways, ports, and rivers are clearer. Many highways, nearly empty, are clearing the air; animals of all kinds are enjoying congregating in places they've long been evicted from.

We read in St. Paul's letter to the Romans, "The whole earth groans and labors as it awaits its redemption". I think we all could use a Breath of Fresh air. I invite you to go out and behold the glory and splendor of God. Look around and see nature unfolding all around. Observe the buds on the trees, the returning birds; look up and see the sky. The sun rose this morning and will surely set this evening. Tonight, behold the heavens.

Last night the stars were brilliant. The more you appreciate God's handiwork revealed in nature, the more you can appreciate Him, who is the creator of all there is, both seen and unseen.

In today's gospel from John 3, we read "a light came into the world". That light is Jesus, and He is still here amongst us even as we struggle in the darkness of this horrific pandemic. He is faithful and will see us through to a brighter day, Alleluia!

Have you ever wondered why, when Jesus rose from the grave on Easter Sunday, He was mistaken for a gardener?

I'll leave you with a few of my favorite scripture verses about God's good earth on this Earth Day.

Remain in His peace and joy,

Fr. Peter

Genesis 1:10, 2:9, 2:15

Psalms 8:3-4, 19:1, 24:1-10, 69:34, 95:4-5, 96:11-12, 104:24-25

Song of Solomon 2:12

Job 12:7-10

Isaiah 24:4-6, 40:8, 42:5, 55:12

Romans 1:20

Revelation 4:11

