

## Lenten Reflections on Creation Care

*These reflections on the Sunday readings for the first five Sundays of Lent 2024 were prepared by the Creation Care Ministry of St Patrick Church-Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH. February 2024.*

### **WEEK 1      FEB 18, 2024      Theme: Life-Giving Water**

READINGS: Gn 9:8-15, Peter 3:18-22, Mk 1:12-15

#### Reflection

There are many lands today that are flooded. Senegal and many islands are losing much if not all of their land. And there are many places that are suffering from lack of water in the Middle East and areas of the US. Currently California seems to be suffering from both too much and too little water. The average American uses 82 gallons of water a day and could decrease usage by 20% with water efficient fixtures and appliances.

#### Prayer

O God, help us look to you and your manifestation in the beauty of creation. Help us consider the needs of the poor in our common home. Help us be more selfless and more generous.

#### Petition

For the earth, our common home, that we can use less of the earth's resources, we pray.

#### Action

- 1-Work at not wasting water and food.
- 2-Refrain from single use containers.
- 3-Pray for the people of the world whose lands have been damaged by too much or not enough water.

### **WEEK 2      FEB 25, 2024      Theme: Earth: God's Dwelling Place**

READINGS: Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18, Psalm 116: 10, 15, 16-19, Romans 8:31b - 34  
Mark 9:2-10

#### Reflection

With Jesus, God modeled self-sacrifice for others as the only authentic sacrifice, leaving behind needless destruction of life. God's creation of, love for, and presence in natural life sustains and works together with our creativity to enhance all life on our planet.

We are called beyond the belief that the demands of human flourishing justify destruction of God's creation. We are damaging the natural systems that have been our home and sustenance, and the source of wonder and the revelation of God. The earth's abundance can provide adequately for all that we need, and yet we demand to extract excess riches for our wasteful and competitive lifestyles of consumption.

Peter, James, and John's instinct was to provide a dwelling place for the divine presence on the mountain. Jesus declined, leading them to find that dwelling place within the people called together to follow his way of equal sharing of goods.

Our creative role within nature has enabled us to provide for human thriving that can be extended to all God's people of Earth while living peaceably with God's creation. So we now need to learn from our mistaken abuse of nature that is rebounding to needlessly increase human suffering. Sacrificing our excessive and self-centered demands, for the good of all, and allowing natural systems to return to their supportive equilibrium, would allow us to experience our world as the wondrous dwelling place of God that it has always been since our Creation.

### Prayer

Abundant God, free us from our heedless desires for powerful control over your Creation. Renew our hope that we can turn and use our freedom as your children to restore our inheritance of a flourishing world and reduce the suffering of your people and creatures that we're causing. Move us beyond greed, dominance, and competition to appreciate your self-gifts of sharing, serving, and cooperation modeled by your servant Jesus.

### Petition

Gracious God, we are your children given the abundant inheritance of Earth, our common home. May we learn to act to maintain our lands, waters, and skies as your dwelling place and sacrifice to meet the needs of all your people and creatures on Earth.

### Actions

- Read psalms that praise nature's role in revealing God's glory and inspiring our praise.
- Read poetry like that of Gerard M. Hopkins that describes both the damage humans routinely inflict on nature and also the wonder of how God's creatures, including we humans, express God's life and action here on earth.
- Engage yourself in a new activity that inspires and expresses your hope for renewal of sustainable living.

## **WEEK 3**

**MAR 3, 2024**

**Theme: Earth: God's Temple is a Holy Place**

READINGS: Ex 20: 1-17, Ps 19: 8-11, 1 Cor 1:22-25, Jn 2: 13-25:4-5-42 – Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers in the temple

### Reflection

“Take these out of here, and stop making my father's house a marketplace” (John 2:16)

There were those in John's gospel who chose to misuse and thwart the purpose of God's temple. These “thieves” sought to create a “counterfeit relationship with God based on sacrifice of others over love.” God's temple was and is a place where the presence and worship of God is mediated by the gathering and love of those gathered there. This was not so to the merchants who sought to make profits and place their own excessive welfare above the true purpose of the temple. They trampled on the right relationship with God that others were in good faith trying to foster. Those thieves sought to exploit, fool, cheat, and hinder access to God's blessings often to the detriment of the least among us.

Does this sound familiar to what is happening to our earth today? To God's beautifully created world, to God's earthly temple, to the world looked at by God in Genesis and saw it was good...by those who still want more? Who are the profiteers of today who hinder access to this beautiful world and misuse the purpose of our world? Isn't God always choosing to bless us? Always seeking an abundant life for us? Yet some of the rich and powerful steal land for profit, knowingly pollute our valuable water and air and refuse to see the harm to others who only choose to live in right relationship with the earth and, subsequently, with God. And for what? For profit—to make the earth merely a marketplace. Then when the prophets of our time seek to offer remedies to the problems facing the earth, many in power choose not to listen. Certainly we can understand the righteous and passionate indignation of Jesus, our Lover Incarnate.

When our brothers and sisters during the time of the Exodus went astray, God gave them the ten commandments as guideposts to a right relationship with God. He provided them with the ten commandments to help them live a real life. Let us pray for the grace to hear the prophets of our time who diligently seek to right the thwarted purpose of God's earthly temple and in doing so encourage a right relationship with God once again.

#### Prayer

Dear God, help us to “turn again, care for your vine, protect what your right hand has planted. Your vineyards are trampled, uprooted and burned, come to us Father of Might. (Bob Dufford, SJ)

#### Petition

Lord, grant us the wisdom to care for the earth and cultivate it. Help us to act now for the good of those suffering today and for the good of future generations and all your creatures.

#### Action

Read Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation, *Laudate Deum* <https://laudatedeum.church/laudate-deum-english/>

### **WEEK 4      MAR 10, 2024**

**Theme: By grace shall we be saved, brought back to life through Christ Jesus.**

READINGS: 2 Chronicles 36: 14-23, Ps 137: 1-6, Eph 2:4-10, Jn 3: 14-21 – For God so loved the world that He gave his only son, so that all who believe might have eternal life

#### Reflection

The gospel for this Sunday: “God so loved the world that He gave his only Son...that the world might be saved through Him...the light came into the world, but the people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil.”

In the first reading, God warns the people of Jerusalem, who were “practicing all the abominations of the nations and polluting the Lord's temple.” Because God had compassion for the people, messengers were sent to warn them. But the people mocked the messengers, “despised his warnings, and scoffed at his prophets.”

Eight years after publishing his monumental encyclical letter, *Laudato Si': On Our Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis produced an exhortation to all Roman Catholics, called *Laudate Deum*.

He quotes the bishops of the African continent who have described the attacks on nature through human made climate change “a tragic and striking example of structural sin.” The Holy Father does not present this as merely an environmental issue but as “a global social issue and one intimately related to the dignity of human life.”

Despite the calamities around us, there is reason to hope. In the second reading, St. Paul tells us that “by grace you have been saved through faith...it is the gift of God.” Even when we were “dead in our transgressions, [God] brought us to life with Christ.” This is the Jesus who “was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attraction full of fondness and wonder” (Pope Francis, in *Laudato Si'*).

By the grace of God, and through our faith as followers of Jesus, we can heed the call of Pope Francis to work together to create processes of transformation to care for our common home.

### Prayer

Merciful and compassionate One, for too long we have ignored the messengers and scoffed at the prophets. Our attacks on Your creation through human made climate change are personal and structural sin. We ask for your forgiveness. And we have hope that by Your grace we will be saved through faith in You and Christ Jesus. Amen.

### Petition

As we recognize the signs of climate catastrophes that disproportionately impact Your poor and vulnerable children around the globe, we ask that all people will heed the urgent call of Pope Francis to work together to care for this earth, our common home.

### Actions

- Learn about methane emissions, a major driver of climate change, coming from meat and dairy production. Add a meatless day besides Friday to your week all year round.
- Respond to Pope Francis' call to care for our common home. Take the Laudate Deum Action Pledge: <https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

## **WEEK 5**

**MAR 17, 2024**

**Theme: Create a clean heart in each of us**

READINGS: Jer 31:31-34, Ps 51: 3-15, Heb 5:7-9, Jn 12:20-33

### Reflection

In the first reading from the prophet Jeremiah, we are reminded of broken covenants. In Genesis, God gives land to Abraham and his descendants and promises abundance. In return, God expects that the people be good stewards of it. After the Great Flood, God says that in order to avoid future destruction, we are to “recall the covenant I have made between me and you and all living beings.” Our covenant with God obliges humans to steward and protect all of creation.

What is the heart of the matter?

Psalm 51 (Create a clean heart in me, O God) is one of the penitential psalms. Theologians describe it as a sinner's guide, showing the sinner how to return to God's grace. “Have mercy on me...wash me from my guilt...a clean heart create for me...give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me.”

In addressing the global crisis before us and facing the facts (“It is no longer possible to doubt the human—‘anthropic’—origin of climate change,” Pope Francis writes in *Laudate Deum*), we must approach God with a penitential heart. Recognize and admit our guilt. Seek forgiveness. And resolve to follow a different path, one that will give us back the joy of God’s salvation.

And, lucky for us, God is truly merciful, patient, and compassionate. After more than one broken promise, God says that this time He’ll make it stick. Not a rainbow that appears in the clouds after the flood waters recede. Not commandments etched on stone tablets. This time God “will place my law within them and write it down upon their hearts. I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more” (Jer 31: 33-34).

This is a most critical and challenging time for our planet, for our very existence. As Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us, we are on a path toward mutual destruction. So during this season of Lent, let us scrutinize this path of destruction that we are on. Let us repent, turn around, and believe in the gospel. Let us seek true forgiveness and deepen our resolve to follow the path of Jesus, who alone is our way, our truth, our light, our salvation.

#### Prayer

Gracious and merciful God, we seek forgiveness for the times we have broken our covenant with you and with all of your abundant and glorious creation. Help us to have the resolve, the vision, and the hope to get off this destructive path of human greed and folly that has led us to the climate crisis. We know that with your grace and compassion, we can work together to care for our common home.

#### Petition

During this season of Lent, we ask God to create a clean heart in each of us. May we have the resolve to follow the path of Jesus, who alone is our way, our truth, our light, our salvation.

#### Actions

-Learn how our Church’s deep history of teaching on creation , ecology, and the most vulnerable motivates, inspires, and compels us to take action to care for our common home:

<https://catholicclimatecovenant.org/>

-Read about “Water, Holy Water,” a sacred gift from God which connects and sustains all life:

<https://www.creationjustice.org/water.html>