We focus and rightly so, on the science of climate change that we sometimes forget that climate as part of the Earth’s environment has a spiritual dimension. Pope Francis says it very well in his 2015 Encyclical Laudato Si (On Care for Our Common Home) when he says in the very first chapter, “We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth; our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air, and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.” I asked a friend of mine, who is quite knowledgeable on the science of climate change, to write her thoughts as a person of faith why she feels that it is our spiritual responsibility to take care of the Earth? Here’s what she wrote.

Dear Sister Jane,

As a Person of Faith, Why Do I Feel That It Is Our Spiritual Responsibility to Take Care of the Earth?

First of all, I did not realize that I am a person of Faith, but when I heard that from you, I realized that I am certainly a person of deep Faith in all that has been created and that which has created it. Thank you for bringing that to my attention.

I feel that all life is sacred and that includes everything that is on this planet. Each entity has a purpose that completes all cycles of life: minerals plants and animals, sunlight, air and water. As humans we need something from all of those kingdoms to exist and our molecular structure has many similarities in common with each of those elements that make up a human body.

Many cultures who have come before us who were in closer contact with the earth recognized this and gave thanks for all that we have been given and all that we share in our daily existence with them. We are here to co-exist, which to me means to live together in harmony peace and love, taking only what we really need and giving thanks and recognition for what we have been given.

I can’t see that man has created any of these elements. I see that they were here before we existed, and we are made up from the same atoms and molecules that make up this planet.

The Earth is certainly our home. I was thinking about how we treat our homes and how we treat the earth. If our only source of water was our well, would we throw our trash and chemicals in our well? If our only source of heat was from our fireplace, would we allow the smoke to fill up our house and contaminate our air? If our source of food was from the plants and animals would we care for our gardens so that our food would be bountiful and keep the meat that we feed our children free from disease? If our roof leaked would we repair it? If our foundation sagged would we shore it up?

We want our homes to be a sanctuary for our families, a place where they would feel a sense of comfort and love and protection and safety. A place to always come back to when we venture out to discover the world, and look for a place to welcome us when we have grown weary and want to rest, A place that has enough to sustain our bodies and our spirits because of the love that holds it together.

The Earth is our Home. A living entity created to nurture all of her inhabitants with her complex systems of continuing life.

I was in the mangroves in the Florida Keys many years ago picking trash out of the mangrove roots. I marveled at how clear the water was and how the mangrove’s job is to filter the water. This is where much of life begins and I watched minnows, crabs and snails move about in the nursery, protected from predators until they reach a size to move out into deeper water. The water moved in and out with the tide, it was cool and shady and green. In that moment of awe, I came to realize that we have been put into The Garden of Eden and we have forgotten what we have been given. This planet is paradise, full of life and beauty and bounty that can take your breath away if you stop to look and breathe and appreciate where we are. Sunrises, sunsets, thunder and lightening.
storms, bird song, soft eyes of furry creatures, majesty of great mountains, life that flows in all rivers into the mother ocean. Humans, plants and animals are a rainbow of diversity and beauty of creation. When did we stop noticing? When did we forget? When did we stop giving thanks for all that we have been given? When did we start feeling that we don’t have enough?

I would like to see a movement that is a ‘Return to Gratitude’. In recognizing the blessings that we have been given perhaps we could remember to hold them sacred and treat all of life as a sacred experience. What a wonderful world it could be. John Lennon said it so well in his song Imagine. Imagine the world we want to see. Create the world we want it to be.

Oh, I love this world. It is an honor and a blessing to be here. It is so beautiful and I am grateful for the experience.

By Donna Smith

A Complex Crises That is Both Economic and Environmental

I understand the issue of climate change as having three pillars: reality, action and spiritual. The reality is that we are experiencing dramatic weather changes; such as, drought, increase in rainfall, increase in severe storms, increase of record breaking higher temperatures, and sea level rise. Science has demonstrated the fact that the Earth is warming and will continue to warm unless humans take dramatic action to slow it down. This requires action by individuals, governments, corporations, and institutions to participate in the use of alternative sources of energy that do not require the use of fossil fuels. “Global climate change poses a greater threat to the integrity of creation than any other human-caused environmental problem.” Katie Hirschboeck, Ph.D.

Action to slow down climate change will require a change in our economic policies. In their pastoral letter regarding the U.S. economy, the U.S. Catholic Bishops wrote, “the economy exists for people and not people for the economy. usceb, Economic Justice for All, 1986. Pope Francis issued an even stronger statement when he said, “The goal of economics and politics is to serve humanity, beginning with the poorest and most vulnerable wherever they may be, even in their mothers’ wombs. Every economic and political theory or action must set about providing each inhabitant of the planet with the minimum wherewithal to live in dignity and freedom, with the possibility of supporting a family, educating children, praising God and developing one’s own human potential. This is the main thing; in the absence of such a vision, all economic activity is meaningless.” Pope Francis, June 17, 2013.

“The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly – not any ethics whatsoever, but an ethics which is people centered.” Pope Benedict XVI, Caritas in Veritate, #45.

“Let us protect with love all that God has given us.” Pope Francis, March 19, 2013. We are all called to protect the whole of creation, each other, the poor, and ourselves.

We have a moral obligation to care for both creation and the poor. Pope Benedict XVI implored us to deepen our spiritual core when he said, “If we take the time, truly take the time, to nurture our own holiness, we will undoubtedly see that our own actions have consequences for other people and the planet as a whole. If we take the time to listen to our hearts, we will easily understand how environmental degradation and climate change compounds our duty to care for the most vulnerable.” Pope Benedict XVI, August 7, 2006.

The third pillar for addressing climate change is spiritual. “Our great challenge is to imagine how a new era of Earth’s history can emerge.” Mary Evelyn Tucker, Ph.D. To help us to imagine a new era of Earth’s history, we look to guidance from the Holy Spirit. On the feast of the Most Holy Trinity we pray, “Glory to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; to God who is, who was, and who is to come.” The God ‘who is to come’ is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit provides us with the gifts we need to achieve our goal of reducing the growth of climate change. “Today we are invited to experience the spirituality of ecology in which the gifts of the Spirit are of inestimable help. The Holy Spirit is the energy force that moves, guides and sustains us and the Church.” Friar Eduardo Scarel, O.Carm., Ecological Conversion, 2019.
The Gifts of the Holy Spirit as described by Katie Hirschboeck, Ph.D.

PIETY or Reverence calls us to service and stewardship. The gift of piety gives us the desire to worship God and serve God and others out of love. Stewardship is a way of life. It challenges us to see the hand of God in all Creation.

FEAR or Wonder fills us with fear inspired by the sacred. As this gift grows stronger, our trust in God expands. Fear confirms the virtue of hope. “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Proverbs 3:18.

UNDERSTANDING allows wisdom to penetrate to our very core, helps us grasp its essence with certitude. This gift opens our eyes to see the world in the larger context. God at work in our midst... everything is interconnected. It shields us from being confused by all the conflicting messages in our culture about the right way to live.

WISDOM reveals a deeper meaning to life. Wisdom allows us to see the ‘hand of God’ at work in our lives and in the world - to see God in everyone and everything, everywhere.

KNOWLEDGE allows the universe to reflect on itself through us. Knowledge reveals everything in the created world in relation to God. It teaches us that God is manifested in even the tiniest of creatures. Once we truly know this we can no longer say – we didn’t know.

COUNSEL or Right Judgment. Counsel enlightens and assists Counsel enlightens and assists us in discernment and prudent decision-making. Counsel allows us to judge best how to ACT and equips us for ADVOCACY. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, he will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” John 14:26.

FORTITUDE imbues us with courage, the strength to act, and to sacrifice. Fortitude gives us the strength to follow through on the actions suggested by the Gift of Counsel.

Let us take the time to listen to our hearts and nurture our own holiness by reflecting on the ways we can absorb the Gifts of the Holy Spirit into our spirituality so we can ‘act’ on matters of climate change.

We pray: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be recreated and renew the face of the Earth. “...Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience. Laudato Si #217 “We can be silent witnesses to terrible injustices if we think that we can obtain significant benefits by making the rest of humanity, present and future, pay the extremely high costs of environmental deterioration.” Laudato Si #36.

“We are thankful to our Mother the Earth, for she gives us everything that we need for life. She supports our feet as we walk about upon her. It gives us joy that she still continues to care for us, just as she has from the beginning of time. To our Mother, we send thanksgiving, love and respect. Now our minds are one.

We turn our thoughts to the Creator and send greetings and thanks for all the gifts of Creation. Everything we need to live a good life is here on Mother Earth. For all the love that is still around us, we gather our minds together as one and send our choicest words of greetings and thanks to the Creator. Now our minds are one.” Thanksgiving oration by the Onondaga Nation, USA.

“When we speak of the ‘environment,’ what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Getting to the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behavior patterns, the ways it grasps reality, and so forth. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions that consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather one complex crisis that is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the underprivileged, and the same time protecting nature.” Laudato Si, # 139.

Jane Remson, O. Carm

CARE FOR ENVIRONMENT: A SPIRITUAL APPROACH

From time to time, our popes called people to care for environment. They reminded us that our responsibility within creation and our duty towards environment and the Creator are an essential part of our faith. Pope John Paul II in his message for the celebration of the World Day of Peace 1990 urged the faithful people to recognize their obligation to contribute to the restoration of a healthy environment. Then, Pope Benedict XVI in his message at the World Peace Day 2010 said that the ecological crisis showed the urgency of a solidarity which embraces time and space. He added that a greater sense of intergenerational solidarity was urgently needed. Future generations cannot be saddled with the cost of this present generation’s used of common environmental resources. Finally, Pope Francis in his encyclical letter entitled Laudato Si: On care for Our Common Home urgently appealed for a new dialogue about how we were shaping the future of our planet. He added that all of us need a conversation which included everyone, since the environmental challenge we were undergoing, and its human roots, concerned and affected us all.

There have been a lot of activities done by those who concern with the decreasing quality of our environment. Some of them suggest reducing the use of fuel so that the air pollution may decrease, some suggest planting more trees, some suggest having environmental friendly industries, some suggest changing lifestyle, and others. Those suggestions may be correct but the most important thing is to raise people’s awareness. With this awareness, people will voluntarily change their lifestyle and do the
activities which increase the quality of the environment including reducing the use of oil, planting more trees, having environmental friendly industries, etc.

Some people may doubt how awareness may increase the quality of our environment since awareness deals with person per person, something small and personal, while the environment is something big, something universal. But we have to remember what starts as something small and personal may simultaneously make a big change.

Living in awareness of the present is not easy. Most people leave their beds in sleeping states. They live their lives in an automated condition. They do activities unconsciously, even they do not know what they are doing or feeling. Rules and regulations provide structure to the unconscious life and routines provide structure to the unconscious day. This makes them prefer staying in stability and established condition, they choose living in sleeping state, they prefer unconscious state than conscious one. The result is that they do not aware of themselves and their environment. They just do not care what happens surrounds them.

What should be done toward them who live in that condition? They have to be woken up. Their eyes need to be opened. Their mind needs to be enlightened. Their spirit needs to be encouraged. They have to be help to move from their unconscious life to the conscious one. We have to make them aware of themselves and of their environment. They have to realize that if they just do not care with their environment and keep exploiting it irresponsibly they will make the environmental crisis worse.

History shows that spirituality is a long time source of societal change. It has the potential to affect fundamentally how we relate to our reality and our environment. Given the power of spirituality to shape our views of ourselves and nature, spiritual awareness may play an important role in making this world better. Spiritual awareness is awareness which is rooted in the spirituality. It is our inner self, strength and truth. It reminds us of who we really are and what we will become in the future. It is all that exists inside us. Spiritual awareness guides us to a greater tomorrow. It helps us to differentiate right from wrong. It guides us how we act and how we behave. Our spiritual awareness helps us understand ourselves and our environment.

For Catholics, spiritual awareness is grounded in spiritual convictions drawn from Revelation. It should be based in the reflection on the Bible. By spiritual awareness, the person’s reason judges the morality of his actions (past, present, or future). In this judgment, he sees God’s will. Every person must have sufficient spiritual awareness so he can hear and follow God’s will. By spiritual awareness, a person assumes responsibility. Even in evil deeds, the awareness remains an inner witness to truth that the choice was evil. This true judgment makes clear that the person must seek forgiveness and choose the good in the future."

Through spiritual awareness people will realize that respect for their life means respecting all of God’s creation and God as the Creator. Creation is a gift from God and provides us with the basics for our lives. Creation provides us with what we need to live well and becomes a place where we experience a great closeness with God. In the beauty and wonder of the creation, we see our God. This spiritual awareness must then force us to re-engage with our environment and take responsibility for it; live sustainably, live so that there are enough resources for everyone.

F.X. Hariawan Adji