



The Carmelite NGO

World Environment Day – June 5, 2020

Every 5 June since 1973 has been observed as the UN-established World Environment Day. The purpose of the day is to bring increased awareness to worldwide environmental concerns, like climate change, deforestation, pollution of the world's oceans, and unsustainable development that could harm plant and animal species.

***The Spirit of the Lord has filled the whole world and that which contains all things
understands what is said, alleluia. – Wisdom 1:7***

Pope Francis gave this Message for Earth Day, April 22, 2020.

Today we celebrate the fiftieth Earth Day. This is an occasion for renewing our commitment to love and care for our common home and for the weaker members of our human family. As the tragic coronavirus pandemic has taught us, we can overcome global challenges only by showing solidarity with one another and embracing the most vulnerable in our midst. The Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* deals precisely with this "Care for our Common Home". Today, let us together reflect a little on that responsibility which characterizes "our earthly sojourn" (*Laudato Si'*-160). We must grow in awareness of caring for our common home.

We are fashioned from the earth, and fruit of the earth sustains our life. But, as the book of Genesis reminds us, we are not simply "earthly;" we also bear within us the breath of life that comes from God (cf. Gen 2:4-7). Thus we live in this common home as one human family in biodiversity with God's other creatures. As *mimago Dei*, in God's image, we are called to have care and respect for all creatures, and to offer love and compassion to our brothers and sisters, especially the most vulnerable among us, in imitation of God's love for us, manifested in his Son Jesus, who became man in order to share our state with us and save us.



Because of our selfishness we have failed in our responsibility to be guardians and stewards of the earth. "We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair" (ibid., 61). We have polluted it, we have despoiled it, endangering our very lives. For this reason, various international and local movements have sprung up in order to appeal to our consciences. I deeply appreciate these initiatives; still it will be necessary for our children to take to the streets to teach us the obvious: we have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us.

We have failed to care for the earth, our garden-home; we have failed to care for our brothers and sisters. We have sinned against the earth, against our neighbors, and ultimately against the Creator, the benevolent Father who provides for everyone, and desires us to live in communion and flourish together. And how does the earth react? There is a Spanish saying that is very clear about this. It goes: "God always forgives; we humans sometimes forgive, and sometimes not; the earth never forgives". The earth does not forgive: if we have despoiled the earth, its response will be very ugly.

How can we restore a harmonious relationship with the earth and with the rest of humanity? A harmonious relationship... We so often lose sight of harmony: harmony is a work of the Holy Spirit. In our common home too, on the earth, and in our relationships with people, with our neighbor, with the poorest, how can we



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restore this harmony? We need a new way of looking at our common home. For this is not a storehouse of resources for us to exploit. For us believers, the natural world is the "Gospel of Creation": it expresses God's creative power in fashioning human life and bringing the world and all it contains into existence, in order to sustain humanity. As the biblical account of creation concludes: "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Gen 1:31). When we see these natural tragedies that are the earth's response to our mistreatment, I think: "If I ask the Lord now what he thinks about it, I do not believe he is saying it is a very good thing". It is we who have ruined the Lord's work!

In today's celebration of Earth Day, we are called to renew our sense of sacred respect for the earth, for it is not just our home but also God's home. This should make us all the more aware that we stand on holy ground!

Dear brothers and sisters, "let us awaken our God-given aesthetic and contemplative sense" (Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Querida Amazonia*, 56). The prophetic gift of contemplation is something that we can learn especially from indigenous peoples. They teach us that we cannot heal the earth unless we love and respect it. They have the wisdom of "living well", not in the sense of having a good time, no, but of living in harmony with the earth. They call this harmony "living well".

At the same time, we need an ecological conversion that can find expression in concrete actions. As a single and interdependent family, we require a common plan in order to avert the threats to our common home. "Interdependence obliges us to think of one world with a common plan" (*Laudato Si'*-164). We are aware of the importance of cooperation as an international community for the protection of our common home. I urge those in positions of leadership to guide the preparations for two important international Conferences: COP15 on Biodiversity in Kunming, China, and COP26 on Climate Change in Glasgow, United Kingdom. These two meetings are of great importance.



I would like to support concerted action also on the national and local levels. It will help if people at all levels of society come together to create a popular movement "from below". The Earth Day we are celebrating today was itself born in precisely this way. We can each contribute in our own small way. "We need not think that these efforts are going to change the world. They benefit society, often unbeknown to us, for they call forth a goodness which, albeit unseen, inevitably tends to spread" (*Laudato Si'*-212).

In this Easter season of renewal, let us pledge to love and esteem the beautiful gift of the earth, our common home, and to care for all members of our human family. As brothers and sisters, which we are, let us together implore our heavenly Father: "Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth" (cf. Ps 104:30).

"We have no future if we destroy the very environment that sustains us."

On this 50th anniversary of Earth Day, our planet is facing one of the greatest challenges to the health and well-being of its people. And yet, in the midst of this struggle, we are reminded of the value of compassion and mutual support. The current global pandemic threatens us all, without distinctions of race, culture or gender, and our response must be as one humanity, providing for the most essential needs of all.

Whether we like it or not, we have been born on this earth as part of one great family. Rich or poor, educated or uneducated, belonging to one nation or another, ultimately each of us is just a human being like everyone else. Furthermore, we all have the same right to pursue happiness and avoid suffering. When we recognize that all beings are equal in this respect, we automatically feel empathy and closeness towards others. Out of



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this comes a genuine sense of universal responsibility: the wish to actively help others overcome their problems.

Our mother earth is teaching us a lesson in universal responsibility. This blue planet is a delightful habitat. Its life is our life; its future, our future. Indeed, the earth acts like a mother to us all; as her children, we are dependent on her. In the face of the global problems we are going through it is important that we must all work together.

I came to appreciate the importance of environmental concern only after escaping from Tibet in 1959, where we always considered the environment to be pure. Whenever we saw a stream of water, for instance, there was no worry about whether it was safe to drink. Sadly, the mere availability of clean drinking water is a major problem throughout the world today.

We must ensure that the sick and the valiant health-care providers throughout the world have access to the fundamental necessities of clean water and proper sanitation to prevent the uncontrolled spread of disease. Hygiene is one of the bases of effective health care.

Sustainable access to properly equipped and staffed health-care facilities will help us meet the challenges of the current pandemic that ravages our planet. It will also offer one of the strongest defenses against future public health crises. I understand that these are precisely the objectives set forth in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals that address challenges to global health.

As we face this crisis together, it is imperative that we act in a spirit of solidarity and cooperation in order to provide for the pressing needs, particularly of our less fortunate brothers and sisters around the world. I hope and pray that in the days ahead, each of us will do all we can to create a happier and healthier world. - His Holiness the Dalai Lama, April 22, 2020.

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

How can we restore a harmonious relationship with the earth and with the rest of humanity?

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We cannot heal the earth unless we respect it. How is my country respecting the earth?



"Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth" – Psalm 104-30