



The Holy Spirit Province NEWSLETTER

10 November 2021



THE PASSION OF THE EARTH 33RD SUNDAY B

Daniel 12:1-13; Hebrews 10:11-14, 18; Mark 13:24-32

We recall with both sadness and gratitude, the Passion of Jesus Christ. We are well aware of our own sufferings, and to some extent the sufferings of many people in Myanmar and Afghanistan. What we need to become far more conscious of, however, is the passion of Mother Earth, the only planet inhabited by human beings, the only place where human beings can live, the only place where God has put us. Tragically, as a result of massive industrialization, our earth, has been exploited, assaulted, ravaged and destroyed at a rate unprecedented in history. For me, 'the time of distress' mentioned by Jesus in his gospel prophecy today, is the present distress of the earth, and the distress of the peoples of the earth who, more than ever before, are asking questions of survival and sustainability: 'Is it all over? Or is there anything we can do to save God's good and beautiful world, not only for ourselves but for all the generations of human beings who will come after us?'

Consider just a few facts about the damage that has been inflicted and continues to be inflicted on the finite resources of our earth by our modern, technological, industrial, consumer, throw-away society. In global terms, our modern industrialized society is destroying our air, water, sunlight and soils, and causing the extinction of many creatures that God has placed on this earth with us. Every part of the globe and every ecosystem on earth is now affected.

There is an acute problem with LAND. Poor land management, overgrazing, chemical agriculture, crops of one kind only, deforestation and population pressures have caused soil poisoning, soil erosion, and desert territory, on an alarming scale. About 3500 million hectares - an area the size of North and South America are affected by land degradation resulting in reduced cropping and ultimately desert territory. Experts at Cornell University, New York, estimate that about 85 billion tonnes of soil are lost each year worldwide. In Australia, from a total of 5 million square kilometres used for agriculture and grazing, about 2.7 million square kilometres are affected by wind erosion, water erosion, and salinity. Applying the brakes will involve tree planting, improved farming techniques, organic farming, and better land use.

There is an acute problem with WATER. Human activity is polluting water in the oceans, rivers and lakes. More than 97% of all the water on earth is seawater. During the 1998 UNESCO Year of the Ocean, it emerged that the oceans are being seriously over-fished and polluted. Areas of the oceans close to the continental shelf are contaminated with human, agricultural, industrial and radioactive waste, much of it toxic and carcinogenic. Because we human beings have tended to treat the oceans as sewers, the Baltic, Mediterranean, Black, Caspian, Yellow and South China Seas, are all seriously damaged. Even Australia's Great Barrier Reef, which runs for 1,284 miles, is under threat to its coral and sea creatures because of rising ocean

temperature and agricultural pollution. According to a report by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1995, over 70% of the world's marine fish stocks are either 'fully to heavily exploited, overexploited, or slowly recovering'. Many countries face problems in the supply of clean water for domestic purposes including drinking.

There is an acute problem with AIR. Chemical pollution is changing the composition of the earth's atmosphere, destroying the ozone layer, producing climate changes and exposing human beings to higher levels of dangerous ultraviolet radiation. The concentration of carbon dioxide, methane, carbon and other 'greenhouse' gases are expected to increase by 30% during the next 50 years. This build-up is likely to raise Earth's temperature by between 1.5 and 4.5 degrees centigrade by the year 2030. As the oceans warm up and expand, sea levels are rising, leading to ferocious storms and severe flooding over lowland areas. The recent call at the Glasgow Climate Conference to limit carbon emissions to one and a half centigrade by 2030, was unacceptable to the big polluters. Dependence on supplies of polluting oil for transport, building materials, cars, plastics and pharmaceuticals, means that oil-based economies will simply collapse if the oil wells run dry.

There is an acute problem with FORESTS. Tropical forests once covered 20% of the land area of the earth. They are now disappearing at an extraordinary rate. An area greater than the United Kingdom is cleared and destroyed each year, for logging, cattle ranching and agriculture. Since 1780 two-thirds of Australia's native forests and three-quarters of our rainforests have been removed, with drastic effects on land fertility, climate, rainfall, agriculture, human health, the health of rivers and estuaries, and the mega-extinction of species. In Australia 2,200 plant species are endangered, half of our mammals are threatened, 10% of our native birds, 20% of our reptiles, amphibians and freshwater fish. Mega-extinction is the direct result of the expansion of the industrial economy into fragile eco-systems like rainforests.

But so far, too many of us have failed to sufficiently register what is happening, let alone respond to it in sustained and creative ways. How then, should we respond to the ecological crisis, this passion of Mother Earth? Pope Francis answers that '... we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's creation ...'. Unless and until we do so personally, collectively and creatively, that question remains as the elephant in the room.

May the passion of Jesus Christ and his everlasting love be always within our minds and hearts!

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