

Care for Creation Mass
St. James Cathedral
September 30, 2017

A few weeks ago, on one of those beastly hot (and smoky!) Sundays that we had too many of this summer, I was visiting before Mass with a couple from Pittsburgh. They told me they were checking out the sights of Seattle and were then going to drive down the coast to California to visit Yosemite. The wife expressed the hope that they wouldn't run into any wildfires when they got there, and I made a passing comment about climate change. Her husband was clearly not amused. In an unmistakably scolding tone he assured me that the climate has always been changing.

It occurred to me that he was taking his cues from the playbook of Donald Trump and not the playbook of Pope Francis!

How good it is today to be celebrating this Care for Creation Mass and not to have to tiptoe around things like climate change or global warming...!

On his flight home from Bogota earlier this month, Pope Francis spoke of the moral responsibility of political leaders to follow the recommendations of scientists and to reduce carbon emissions in order to stem the effects of climate change. (There's that word again!). He talked, too, about how increased global temperatures are causing the breakup of the ice cap at the North Pole and cited a recent news story he had read that claimed that humanity has three years to stop the warming of the planet without making the process irreversible. "I do not know if three years is right or not," he said, "but if we do not turn back, we will surely go down. We have to take this seriously...it is nothing to joke around with." Well, he's certainly right about that. And I might add, not only is it nothing to joke around with, it's nothing to deny, either!

In the reading from the Letter to the Romans, St. Paul made it clear that our destiny as humans and the destiny of the entire created world are closely intertwined even though they are in some ways at war with each other. He used a powerful image to describe this: the image of all of creation groaning, in labor pains. Pope Francis sounded a similar note in his great encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*. "All creatures," he writes, "are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival which is God." But there is groaning and there are labor pains along the way because our most fundamental relationships - with God, with our neighbor, and with the earth itself - have been broken, "ruptured by sin" - to use the Pope's words - "by our presuming to take the place of God, insisting on absolute domination of the created world instead of viewing creation as a gift from God to all and for all." Strong words, sobering words.

We are painfully aware and should be that the great sadness in all this - and the great injustice - is that the ones who suffer the most from this rupture, this disorder, are the world's most vulnerable: the excluded, the marginalized, the poor. They suffer

endlessly as a result of our insatiable greed, and, as the Pope points out, they are the majority of the planet's population. He coins a memorable phrase to describe what is going on here, a phrase that ought to haunt our consciences. I know it haunts mine. The phrase is "the globalization of indifference." *"There is no room,"* he says, *"for the globalization of indifference."*

This is the perfect lead-in to the reading from Luke's gospel where we heard sobering words from Jesus about the greed that underlies all such indifference. *"Avoid greed in all its forms,"* Jesus told us. *"A person may be wealthy but one's possessions do not guarantee life."* And his parable of the rich fool who could hardly keep up with his possessions as they kept increasing and multiplying, drives the point home. *"Relax, eat heartily, drink well, enjoy yourself"* were not the last words of that parable. God had the last word and the word was *"You fool, this very night your life will be demanded of you!"*

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis states very frankly that (and here I quote, *"when people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases and the emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own, and consume."* Those words are a commentary on that gospel passage. So are these: *"[We need to develop] the conviction that 'less is more,' because a constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing, each moment."* In place of the selfish 'more is better mentality,' the Holy Father calls us to follow in the steps of St. Francis: to *"be happy with little, with simplicity of life which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things and the free things: human encounters, serving others, music and art, contact with nature, and prayer."*

My friends, we are here today because we believe that the world is in crisis, that the human family is in crisis, that creation itself is in crisis. We are here because we believe that the only way to deal with this crisis is through a profound conversion of hearts and minds – the kind of "ecological conversion" that St. Francis lived and that Pope Francis calls for in his landmark encyclical on care for our common home. This is a conversion that will change everything. It will change our worldview, our values, our priorities, our lifestyles. Everything! So we have our work cut out for us, don't we!

With that in mind, I invite you to stand and join me in praying the Prayer for Our Earth which is the powerful conclusion of the encyclical, *Laudato Si*.

Father Michael G. Ryan