

HOMILY FOR CATHOLIC EARTHCARE AUSTRALIA
ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI CHURCH, PADDINGTON
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The Christian religion is about life. We see this in the Book of Genesis when the Spirit of God hovers over the chaos of creation out of which then comes teeming life, plant life, animal life, and of course human life. No mention is made of the lowly insects, and microscopic life, I imagine, wasn't even thought about, and yet the lesson is clear. God is the author of all life which God looked at and saw that it was good. But essential for goodness at the highest levels of life, God's creation was blessed with freedom which carried both glory and risk as we see manifest in human and angelic life, in the stories of Adam and Eve, of the Angels, of Cain and Abel, where life's nobility was undermined, and creation became death dealing instead of life affirming. Nevertheless Scripture, particularly in the prophets and Psalms, longed for a time in the future when life would return to the fullness of its possibilities and that time arrived in Jesus Christ, who was born in a stable at Bethlehem and grew up to proclaim that He had brought new life and indeed life in its fullness.

Christ's presence was not just a statement about other worldly life in the future but more importantly about life in the present, life that with a little effort and determination was able to be protected and enhanced at a personal level, a social level, a planetary level, and even a universal level. Christ showed what was possible if only we would love intensely and comprehensively all of creation including the poor, the outcasts, the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, even the criminal outcasts who flanked Him at the moment of His lonely death on Calvary.

That lonely hillside two thousand years ago indicated both the triumph of love and its cost, if, walking in the footsteps of Christ, we dared to embrace life in all its incredibly rich dimensions.

The Scripture today describes these aspects. The woman of Shonem is blessed by God spiritually and physically with new life because of her kindness to Elisha. The letter of Paul to the Romans reminds us that taking on Christ, the life-giver, in Baptism also means taking on His cross. Literally and figuratively we are reminded that **“Having died with Christ we shall return to life with him.”** Finally in the Gospel of Matthew Christ explains that **“anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me.”**

Today on the occasion of the Launch of Catholic Earthcare Australia it is good to remind ourselves that our task like that of St. Francis of Assisi, the Patron of Ecology, is to love life comprehensively and totally but it warns us that such activity will not be easy, as it was not easy for Christ. It will demand putting on Christ, in the power of His Resurrection certainly, but also in the weakness of His Cross as well.

Life and God are inextricably linked. Just as we cannot contemplate life in all its grandeur without seeing behind it all God, its creative source, so also we cannot seek to expand life in this world for ourselves and others without taking up the cross. The diminishment of life in this universe in any way in some way diminishes our capacity for knowing God because faith and life are deeply linked.

It is because of the profound linkage of life in all its variety with the divine that the Pope can so powerfully and eloquently demand ecological conversion for all Catholics. The destruction of life in any form makes it so much more difficult to believe in an all loving, creator God.

As the Pope said way back in 1991 and has repeated frequently since, because of the increasing devastation of the planet *“It is necessary therefore to stimulate and sustain the ‘ecological conversion’ which over these last decades has made humanity more sensitive when facing the catastrophe to which it was moving”*.

In the same address quoting from the Hasidic poem of Martin Buber he links creation and God: *“you are wherever I step ... wherever I turn ... wherever I admire, only you, again you, always you.”*

This incredible incarnational link between God and creation, recognized so beautifully by St. Francis of Assisi, makes this Launch of Catholic Earthcare Australia today absolutely necessary for Catholics and indeed all Christians if we are to promote faith in God as well as enhance the quality of life in our world for all people, especially for the poor and little ones of the world who so often are powerless in trying to prevent the life destroying forces that often unthinkingly, sometimes deliberately, devastate our planet for the benefit of a few, and for the long term suffering of generations yet to come.

So my brothers and sisters as we enter the life, death, and resurrection of Christ here in this Eucharist, let us ask Christ to help us be life-givers as He was, help us to see the presence of our gracious God in the world around as He did, and finally to have the wisdom and courage to make those decisions absolutely necessary for the promotion of God's Kingdom in our magnificent life-filled world for the benefit of all creation now and in the future.