



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



A FRANCISCAN APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

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*“Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day, and You give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.*

~ From the Canticle of the Sun

Our Seraphic Father Francis was so in love with God and creation that he praised God in song with the beautiful *Canticle of the Sun*. Sick and near death, Francis was still about the Father’s business. He was filled with the love of God and love for God. In all his writings, Francis expressed the depths of his love for God and all God’s creation. It was even said that Francis would move a worm to the side of the road so it would not be trampled underfoot. Francis loved all creation, from the greatest to the smallest of creatures, and he praised God for them all.

We have a three-fold responsibility to care for God’s creation. First, as humans living on this temporary home we call Mother Earth. Second, as Christians and children of God who made us stewards of creation. And lastly, as Franciscans, for whom our Seraphic Father Francis called all creatures brother and sister. When we can remember our innate relationship with creation, we will be less likely to destroy it. In the beginning, when the Lord God created the heavens and the earth, God then created us to care for the earth. Then, oh happy fault, oh necessary sin of Adam happened, as our great Easter Exsultet proclaims. And yes, Adam was kicked out of the Garden, but he was never relieved of his responsibility to care for the earth. After the fall, the Lord God sent them out of the Garden, where they would have to work the ground from which the man had been made (cf. Gen 3:23).

Today, our Mother Earth has become a dumping ground for the toxic and harmful and a place where the poor and the vulnerable are most at risk. A Christian leader once wrote: “*Christian people should surely have been in the vanguard of the movement for environmental responsibility, because of our doctrines of creation and stewardship.*” As Franciscans, I believe we have an even greater responsibility because of our Franciscan

tradition. Our Seraphic Father’s *Canticle of the Sun* is our clarion call to right relationship with all of God’s creation.

According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, **Environmental Justice** is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies. For us, this is the “IC” part of JPIC – integrity of creation. The environment includes anywhere we live, work, play and worship and the impact on that global atmosphere. That impact includes the global climate crisis: food, water and the air we breathe.

The earth is the Lord’s and all it holds, sings the Psalmist (Ps 24:1), and as people of faith, we must truly believe that. In the words of our Catholic Bishops: “*At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both ‘the human environment’ and the natural environment.*”

So, what can we do as people of faith? Firstly, focus on the small things that affect the environment. Become more responsible about the food you purchase – eat locally grown and purchase food with less packaging; the energy you consume – use less and unplug unused appliances; and the water you use – turn off the tap when brushing your teeth. These are just a few small things we can do that add up. Another thing we can do is the Water Meditation. I created this years ago as a way to become more conscious and more thankful for the precious gift of water. Whenever you are using water – washing, showering, gardening, doing laundry or even flushing the toilet, take three deep breaths and thank Sister Water for the gift that she is. Say the stanza from the Canticle: “*Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water, she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.*” Be mindful how many times you do this meditation, it is a reminder of how much water you use and how very precious she is to each of us.