

PRAYING AND ACTING FOR OUR COMMON HOME

FOR the third year in succession, Pope Francis is inviting us to join in the Season of Creation, which runs from the beginning of September 1, World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation, to October 4, the feast of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of the environment.

Not all the news on this topic is bad. In the last three years, global emissions from burning fossil fuels have levelled after rising for decades, according to former UN climate change scientist Christiana Figueres. “This is a sign that policies and investments in climate mitigation are starting to pay off.” But he warns that the next three years will be critical if the nations of the world are to reverse the climate crisis. “If we do not stop the growth of emissions by 2020, the crisis will be irreversible,” he insists.

How can we join with Pope Francis to show support for our common home? The first step is to take the pledge for *Laudato Si'*. Visit this site (www.livelaudatosi.org/) to sign on, by adding your name and if your position allows you to do so, by adding the name of the Mercy board or ministry in which you serve.

Pray for and with creation

Start each day during the Season of Creation with a moment of prayer, acknowledging God’s presence in the whole of creation and in each of its tiniest parts. As Job reminds us, “the creeping things of the earth will give you lessons, and the fishes of the sea will tell you all; there is not one such creature but will know this state of things is all of God’s own making...” (Job 12, 8). You may like to begin each of the 34 days of the season by visiting www.mercyworld.org/ to share the meditation displayed on its homepage, with a photo contributed from Mercy sisters and their colleagues around the world. Our focus on prayer helps to remind us that care for the environment involves a conversion of mind and heart.

Live more simply

What is proposed here are some simple ways for reducing our carbon footprint, practical steps that spell a change in lifestyle. Buying fruit and vegetables from local markets, rather than food that has travelled thousands of miles to reach the point of sale. Deciding on one meatless day each week, as a way of recognising the damage done to our landscape by farm animals. Resolving



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not to use the car for trips of less than 2kms, to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Avoiding plastic shopping bags and bottled water whenever possible.

Advocate to protect our common home

This is a way of recognising that, in the call for change, our voice is stronger when it joins with others. Check out www.forestandbird.org.nz, our country’s leading independent conservation organisation, for details on its Fight for Our Water campaign. Visit www.doc.govt.nz/get-involved/volunteer/groups/ to find a community-based group near you, working either with DOC or independently, to restore forests, coasts and wildlife or to manage huts, tracks and historic places. Another website to check out is www.eco.org.nz, the Environment and Conservation Organisation of Aotearoa New Zealand, an umbrella group working since 1972 to keep people in touch with key conservation issues throughout the land. Or see www.coalaction.org.nz, another environmental website, urging an end to the mining and burning of coal in New Zealand. “I am convinced that we can make a difference,” says Pope Francis. “Now is the time for courageous action, an integrated approach to combatting poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time to protecting nature.” (LS, # 139).

– *Dennis Horton*

MERCY DAY – WHAT BETTER DAY TO CELEBRATE CREATION?

A highpoint in the Season of Creation is Mercy Day, celebrated on or about Sunday 24 September, and this year marking 190 years since Catherine McAuley's House of Mercy in Baggot Street, Dublin, first opened its doors. You may like to mark the occasion with a short ritual of prayer and reflection, using some of the material outlined below and adding resources of your own choice to fill in the gaps. Choose a venue for your Mercy Day gathering which acknowledges the beauty and goodness of creation; perhaps your ministry already has a dedicated sacred space outside, with plants and mosaics that hold a special significance in your story. Welcome participants in your own words, and briefly retell that story and the reason for gathering on Mercy Day. Link your own ministry to the witness of Catherine's life. And join with others around the world who are sharing in the Season of Creation, pledging their support for Pope Francis in caring for our common home.

Voice 1: Though she was ahead of her time in many ways, Catherine McAuley would not have known of our concern over climate change and the need to protect the environment. But she certainly heard the cry of the poor, and she was aware of how human lives were affected by the changing seasons.

In May 1838, she writes to a dear friend who has been ill, Sister Frances Warde in Carlow, to say “we had some days of real summer which had the most beneficial effect on two of our sisters who have been ill. Sharp cold returned yesterday and they have felt the change already. We had sleet this morning. I trust it continues mild in Carlow, and I have no doubt of your perfect recovery.”

Voice 2: A few months later, she writes again to Frances Warde about a violent storm which has done huge damage in Dublin. “Sixteen panes of glass were broken in the community room, the pictures all blown down and even the heavy book stand quite upset; the cabinet moved from the wall to near the middle of the room. You may suppose what an appearance on opening the door this morning; poor Sister Teresa was afraid to enter, and came running for me to the choir...”

Voice 3: The winter of the last year of Catherine's life was obviously very severe. In January she writes to Baggot Street from Birr to say, “Here we are, surrounded by Newfoundland ice, obliged to keep hot turf under the butter to enable us to cut it.” That same month, she writes that sisters in London “have a more severe winter than has been for a century. What sailors call ‘the white swan’ (a cloud of snow floating in the air) has been seen off Winchester. “

He Inoi: Prayer

A Mercy Day blessing

*E Te Atua atawhai huhua,
God of abundant mercy,
we give grateful thanks for this 190th
anniversary of Catherine McAuley's
first House of Mercy in Dublin
and for the ministries around the world
that have flowed from this wellspring.*

*May we learn from Catherine
to use our resources to enrich
other lives, especially those who have
little of their own on which to count.*

*Make us stewards of your creation,
caring with love for our common home
and for all that lives within it. Amen*

Voice 4: Next month, Catherine writes, “I am so frozen, so petrified with cold, I can scarcely hold the pen....I feel the frost most acutely in my right side, from my hip to my ankle. I have put on a great flannel bandage with camphorated spirits and trust in God that it will, like a dear old acquaintance, carry me safely home.”

Voice 5: In 1838, a year after Sister Frances Warde has founded St Leo's in Carlow, Catherine writes to say she has received glowing accounts of the convent there. “The delightful description I get makes me very anxious to see it. Sister Frances says she has the poplars in full bloom, with evergreens between, and roses blowing on the mount.”

Voice 6: And she writes a year later with great appreciation to the community in Limerick. “We have this moment received your sweet fruit and flowers – I seldom see any so fragrant. The offering of genuine affection has everything to enhance its value. I am looking at them now, and think the roses have some unusual shades – such bright purple and rich yellow flowers. The gooseberries and apples, jams and jellies are all safe, too.”

End your ritual with a song, and invite your guests to share a comfortable Mercy cup of tea.

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