

Simplicity and Sacrifice: Lent and Creation

As we move further into the season of Lent, it is necessary to consider the suffering of God in creation and our human negligence in caring gratefully for the gift of this most precious earth, our home. With the Inter Governmental Panel on Climate Change beginning to warn that the earth's temperature could rise higher than first thought in response to greenhouse gas emissions, humanity has much to repent.

Lent has traditionally been a time when we 'gave up' or sacrificed things. The old catholic practice of no meat on Fridays is one example. Others have chosen to abstain from some favorite food or pastime or pleasure during the period of Lent. These days, Lent is seen more as a time of interior preparation; a period of personal reflection and examination, a cleansing of the soul, rather than a giving up of some thing.

Perhaps it is time for us to reconsider the practice of 'sacrificing' something in the material order, not only for Lent but for always. Because the reality is that we all consume too much of the material world. There are probably many things we could sacrifice that would begin to reduce the harm done to the earth. However it is unlikely that we will actually make the necessary sacrifices unless we first undergo a deep penance and metanoia, or turning around. And, most especially, we of a religious tradition who understand God as the one who both creates and redeems must undergo this metanoia. For the danger is that our faith in the God who forgives and 'makes all things new' may give us a false 'absolution' from the urgent need to act; to make a radical change to the way we live for the sake of creation. We must also be aware of the 'religious' tendency to divide the 'holy' and split it off from the world. Wendell Berry observed that "Perhaps the great disaster of human history is one that happened to or within religion; that is the conceptual division between the holy and the world, the excerpting of the Creator from creation."

During Lent we attempt to 'empty' ourselves in order that we may journey with Christ towards the Passion. We re-member the sacrifice of the God who became flesh; the God who took on the material order. In Christ there is no division between the holy and the world. There is no division between Jesus, the man who was crucified, and the Cosmic Christ who is risen in all creation. In Christ, now, today 'the whole creation groans.....

There is today a profound lament within many people for the grievous harm done to the earth and God's creatures. This lament however must arise within more of humanity, particularly the most powerful. For until we truly understand that "what we do to the least of these we do unto you....' nothing will change. We will continue to take more than we need, to deny the true cost of our greed, to allow ourselves to be distracted from what is most essential.

So perhaps, during Lent, we might consider withdrawing from some of our over-activity and over consumption to spend time with Christ in creation. We might indeed consider spending some time in the wilderness praying about those 'temptations' that we may realistically choose to refuse.

The consequences of refusing to heed the call to sacrifice are profound. On the ABC News this evening the lead story covered the withdrawal from the Commonwealth Games by Ian Thorpe due to illness. One of the last stories covered the reality that we are losing 50 species of wildlife EVERY DAY. It is now expected that half of the world's biodiversity will be gone within our life time. It seems to me that humanity is gripped by some sort of insanity when a swimmer's bronchitis takes precedence over the horrifying reality of the greatest mass extinctions in 65 million years.

What will we do? We will probably go on watching the television and indulging in all the other endless distractions that seem so important in this world. Why are we not filled with remorse and sorrow at the fact that we have directly caused such incredible loss of life? The irony is of course that it is also the human species that is becoming endangered as we continue on this seemingly inevitable path towards destruction as did the Easter Islanders.

Where is God in all of this? On Good Friday we feel the grief of the Father as his Son is crucified. Perhaps this Lent we might consider the grief of its Creator as this most precious and miraculous earth is laid waste. The hope of the resurrection and ultimate redemption must not lull us into apathy. The hope and redemption must live out of us into the world to meet God's action and saving justice. We must act.

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