

3rd Sunday of Lent Homily



CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Imagine that the world is a human body, and from space, as we have seen in famous pictures taken by astronauts, very beautiful. Blue and green and swirls of cloud. It looks an idyllic place to live. A healthy body. But when we get closer we start to see that the body is not so perfect. The skies are not as clean as we thought as if it was the body of a regular smoker. Both the air around it and parts of the body within are damaged. Then we can see also that there are self-inflicted wounds especially where warfare or disease or environmental disaster have broken out. Patches of sickness across the planet like the black pustules of plague. Areas that once were beautiful and now hard to look at.

Unlike our own bodies the planet does not have just one ruler so that chances of healing the areas of disease, of making the decision to go to the doctor, become more complex. If it was our own body we could do that, but the attempts to create a unified head, such as the United Nations, seem to have limited effect. In the film 'The Physician,' the wise healer (Ben Kingsley) says, "we do not treat the illness but the whole person." So the question is, 'What as individuals or small groups can we do? How can we help heal the planet? Our shared body?'

The first thing is to see us as all involved, all stewards of this body that is our planet. And to see that as we heal our part we are helping heal the whole, not just the one patch of illness. Heal the whole person not the disease. In the gospel the owner is fed up. The fig tree is there for his use, to produce figs for him. But he sees it as nothing more. Not a part of the whole of creation as he is. So his remedy to the gardener is dig it up, and throw it out. Kill it off. But the gardener who by the very nature of his work is more attuned to the way of nature preserves it. 'Don't kill it, but nurture it.'

That I think is what we have to learn, and what the Pope is saying in *Laudato Si*. We are all part of this one Common Home. We share the same earth as the trees and plants and animals. So as the species that is clearly in control at the moment we have the task to heal and not destroy. To give nature time, and to nurture rather than exploit.

This is how God treats us after all. God does not destroy us even though we often injure his creation, in fact, since Noah, God has promised not to do so. But waits and nurtures us. God is only too aware that the wounds in the planet are not only physical but spiritual as well. We are God's creation all together. We are God's work of art, according to St. Paul, and a work of art that is an exhibition above all of life. When God is asked by Moses to be more explicit as to who he is. 'Yes, we know that you are the God of our fathers, but what are you to us?' God then says: 'I am who I Am,' which is not immediately helpful, but 'I am' as you

may remember is from the verb 'to be.' Being. God is existence, is life, its source. Our existence is given by God from God. Our spiritual life, our physical life, psychological life, and the life of the planet are all part of this.

Now Pope Francis says: 'The sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of revealing to us supernatural life.' What he means is that in our services, our worship, we embrace the world, its water, oil, touch, bread and wine, in a different way, because in embracing them we are embracing God too. As the Pope says: The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The aim is to discover God in all things.'

So the main sacrament we attend regularly is the Eucharist, Mass, Holy Communion. People often say, 'What has this to do with daily life?' One way to see it is that it tries to show us that there is no such thing as ordinary life. Life is special. So the Mass takes ordinary people like you and me. It places them in an ordinary situation, eating, sharing food at a table, bread and wine. But then it says, 'But there is always something more in this. God is here where we come together, where we share the food we have been given, where we pray for others. As God enters our world in the incarnation and reveals himself in our form, so Jesus takes our ordinary human life and uses it to take us into God's life. From the Mass hopefully we go out with fresh eyes to see that everything is of God. Life is never ordinary.'

Can it have any effect? Effect life? Yes, because this is a healing sacrament and through it God's healing ripples out into the world. The Mass is a celebration of life. As the Pope says: The humblest Mass in a humble country church is celebrated on the altar of the world. It unites heaven and earth.'

As the Mass heals, so when we go out and care for creation as we plant and grow and nurture trees, flowers, the countryside, or when we care for others, or however we act as stewards, we are sharing in that healing of creation. We often cannot heal directly the other wounds in the world, but we can tend the part of the body of this world that is ours.

In Salford they have started a Laudato Si Centre, to use a plot of ground to teach children and others about God's creation through what they grow there. We are thinking of something similar in our diocese, but bringing together all the various places, like the Boarbank gardens, where we celebrate creation, and adding possibly such a place at Dodding Green. So we will be looking for people, not necessarily only of the parish, who can think of what we can do here. Possibly the first venture would be just to start growing things again.

Lent is a time for healing, which can be for ourselves, spiritually, but that goes together with our common responsibility as God's stewards of the planet, and particularly the bit we live in. We are God's healers. What we do in our part of the planet adds to the healing of our Common Home. Gardeners for God?