

March 15, 2015 – Fourth Sunday of Lent
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2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-10; John 3:14-21

“Rejoice Jerusalem! Be glad for her, you who love her, you who mourned for her...” Isaiah 66:10

We used to call this Sunday “Laetare” in Latin, Sunday, Rejoice Sunday. The presider at Mass still wears rose-colored vestments to remind us that we are now half way between our death remembering Ash Wednesday and our life hopeful Resurrection Sunday. This Sunday’s Eucharistic Liturgy begins with these words of rejoicing in the middle of Lent, our time of awakening and repentance for our sins, our “missing the mark” in care and respect for ourselves and for all our sisters and brothers, the images of God among us.

We rejoice knowing in faith that our brother Jesus lived, died and still lives among us; and that despite our infidelities, continues to send us messengers, warnings and hope calling us to love the Jerusalem, the City of God, which is our earth itself with all its people and creatures. We rejoice not now in the words of Cyrus the king of Persia but in the words of our brother Francis, bishop of Rome, calling every woman, man and child to build the house of God which is our earth.

Pope Francis plans to publish an encyclical on climate change, to meet other faith leaders and lobby politicians at the general UN Assembly in New York this September, when countries will sign up to new anti-poverty and environmental goals. It seems Francis wishes to directly influence the crucial UN climate meeting in Paris next December when countries will try to conclude 20 years of fraught negotiations with a universal commitment to reduce emissions. We can indeed rejoice that he is calling all nations to awaken, to repent of our sins, our infidelities to our sisters and brothers, to the waters, the land, the atmosphere, and all the other species of life. Hopefully all the nations, especially our own will take very practical steps in Paris in December.

Yes, we have all sinned, and missed the mark by treating our earth and its creatures as commodities to be used, resources to be exploited as sources of wealth for the few, as a shopping emporium where those of us with material assets can continue to amass more and more stuff, and finally as a garbage dump for our waste. We rejoice in the voice of Francis amplifying the voices of so many others calling us to turn in love towards our earth and take practical steps to stop polluting the Lord’s Temple through our carbon based, fossil fueled economies.

A personal memory of a poor, crowded British Crown Colony of Hong Kong in the early 1960s with its three million people, most of whom were refugees, and the present financially successful Special Administrative Region Hong Kong of China today with its more than seven million, mostly prosperous, people also reminds me of another contrast. The people were poor

in the 1960s but living in an environment of rich fertile land, clean air and clear waters, but the Hong Kong of today, with its highway and building-covered land, has polluted seas and a seldom sun-bright sky.

A recent photo from space of the thousands of acres of treeless waste, polluted waters and gouged earth of the Canadian tar sands landscape confirms our sinful mindlessness in our ever increasing search and utilization of the carbon based fuels upon which our ever expanding economies like that of Hong Kong are based. We are being called to develop other sources of energy in a responsible way- wind, solar, and small hydro projects. These will reduce our use of carbon which has already eliminated thousands of God's creatures. We are being called to repent now before our damage to our earth home condemns us to a similar elimination.

As Paul says in his letter to the community in Ephesus, "We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for good works." We are called to live in and through these good works on this planet, the only earth we have, at this time of our individual lives. Our handiwork, our good works are those that care for and respect all the creatures of this earth of ours including water, atmosphere and soil, all of which have finite limits. Our good works are those that seek co-responsible development rather than unsustainable plunder of the earth's gifts to us.

In the Gospel we have just heard Jesus say to Nicodemus and to each of us, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." We have always known and rejoiced in the knowledge that we might believe and have eternal life. The condition of our world at this time, the world that God is still creating, this earth which is our only home sustaining us with nourishment is loudly calling us to remember that this blue and white planet with its waters, air and land which we are abusing, is also loved by God and was so loved billions of years before it gave life to our human species.

Let us rejoice that our Brother Francis is calling us to awaken and repent; let us rejoice that the nations of the world are finally awakening to the challenge to save our earth, to save ourselves, to love each other and all creatures so loved by God.

Let us take steps to reduce use of carbon based fuels in our personal lives, to continue pressuring our corporations to develop and use other non-polluting fuels, and demanding our elected legislators to make and enforce the laws and regulations to make this possible.

God does indeed love the world and will continue to do so even if we miss the mark and continue to destroy the species of the earth, and ultimately our own!

Will we love our world and all its creatures as God does?

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