



**SISTERS OF
MERCY**
WORLDWIDE

Today, Sisters of Mercy, through Mercy International Association, use their resources to respond to issues of global poverty demonstrated in the massive displacement of persons worldwide.

The Weave of Life

In approaching the 'Season of Creation' I would like to reflect on the fact that we live in an evolving and expanding universe where nothing is entirely fixed, unchanging or predictable, all is in process of Becoming. The process of evolution, of God's creative energy constantly flaring forth in newness, is the essence of mystery. *"The universe as a whole in all its manifold relationships shows forth the inexhaustible richness of God"* (LS 86). Our Common Home is abundantly endowed for the good of all life. These resources, while abundant, are finite, and therefore need responsible management in co-operation with Earth's processes. *"Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God"* (LS.84).

I recall an insight during the global financial crash in 2008/9 when I came face to face with the ominous reality of 'a *what if moment?* What if any of the vital living systems of planet earth were to crash and no longer function? If we – the community of all life – were to be deprived of sunshine, fresh air, clean water, fertile soil or the companionship of each other, who or what could 'bail us out'? The billions, even trillions of euros, yen, sterling or dollars of the financial crisis response, would be powerless in face of such an irreversible tragedy.

The air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat and the sunlight that nurtures and sustains us and all beings ultimately relies on biodiversity. Biological diversity is the stunning variety of life on earth in all its forms, species, interrelationships, and ecosystems: life in the oceans, on land, in the skies and sub-surface bacteria. Without plants there would be no oxygen, without bees, no pollination, while trees, land and oceans absorb air pollution and coral reefs and mangrove swamps provide protection from cyclones and tsunamis.

Pope Francis is unequivocal: *"The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life"* (LS 2). If the life systems of our planet

are not saved, then everything else is irrelevant, observed Thomas Berry some 20 years ago. The urgency facing us is to widen our circle of compassion to embrace all beings and Earth, our Common Home, struggling while *'being squeezed dry beyond every limit'* (LS 106).

We know that the living systems sustaining all of life are seriously under threat and that we humans are implicated in this process of deterioration. The mass global displacement of people is directly linked to the degradation of the earth. Climate change, pollution, pesticides, plastics, deforestation, desertification of soil, erosion, droughts, floods, population pressure and profound poverty challenge the health and future sustainability of fresh air, clean water, fertile soil and healthy solar rays. The International Red Cross informs us that environmental disasters already displace more people (not to mention other species) than war while the UN predicts that environmental refugees could reach 150 million by 2050.

Planet and people are suffering, crying out to us for help, will we listen and respond? We are all needed in the great work of our time and we can make a difference *"The poor need help now, not next week....something of lasting benefit for the poor is needed"* as our Foundress Catherine reminds us. We realize more clearly now that human health and wellbeing are inextricably linked to the flourishing of earth, what we do to the earth we do to ourselves. Land/soil, plays a key role in biodiversity and the healthy functioning of the planet: water regulation and purification, trees, flowers, plants, soil fertility, wildlife – flora and fauna. The alarming devastation and nutrient loss of this living resource together with widespread water contamination and air pollution has huge implications for sustainable agriculture, food security and world poverty, especially for the more economically disadvantaged.

Pope Francis captures this beautifully in *Laudato Si'* when he challenges us to conversion, to re-connect with our deepest roots in the community of creation: the renewal and re-connection we seek *'entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion'* (LS 220). This echoes his earlier assertion in *Evangelii Gaudium*: *"God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement"*. (LS 89)

This disconnection, the systemic cause of so much devastation and suffering in our world, continues to have serious consequences for planet and people especially in the global South. *'What kind of world do we want to leave to*

those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? (LS 160). Let us wake up before it is too late.

Earth Overshoot Day 2018 was August 1st when human consumption outpaced the planet's ability to replenish vital resources: water, food and clean air. As a result we will be consuming from precious reserves painstakingly built up by Earth over millennia. This means that we currently need 1.7 earths to sustain us. Alarmingly, Earth Overshoot Day has moved rapidly from its inception in 1970 when it registered December 27th.

Our task at this critical moment is to awaken the energies needed to create the new world, to evoke universal communion of all parts of life ' Thomas Berry

In the Season of Creation with the reassuring words of Jesus strengthening our resolve *"I have come that you may have life, life in abundance" (JN 10:10)*, let us be bold for the Common Good. I suggest that we each adopt an aspect of Earth's living systems and biodiversity focusing on its tangible link to the health and wellbeing of people and planet. For example: sun, air, soil, water, earth community, bees, plants, earthworms, ants, trees, flowers. In this we pledge our prayer and blessing for this particular aspect which is essential for the common good. In addition, energy permitting, we could undertake a specific action to effect change for the flourishing of life so that all beings may feel more at home in our common home.

"What we do with our hearts affects the whole universe"
(Carmel of Reno)

By way of some examples, taking time alone and with others to inform ourselves of the wonder, beauty and brokenness of our world and taking time to be mindful, celebrate and heal through rituals. Conscious of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, by praying and working for healthy soil so that people and wildlife do not have to become refugees, outcast, hungry and rootless by planting trees, flowers, organic growing, composting; ensuring clean water for all by eliminating harmful toxins, using only what we need; striving to keep our air fresh by transitioning from fossil fuels, campaigning for renewable energies and more sustainable agriculture and transport; intentionally promoting equality: gender, education, access to resources and work opportunities . Intentions and actions, however small, have an incalculable ripple effect.

Our Foundress, Catherine reminds us that God can form, reform and fit us for his purposes, let us affirm our openness and commitment with Christopher Fry in "A Sleep of Prisoners"

*'Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride we ever took.
Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God?
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake
But will you wake for pity's sake!*

-Nellie McLaughlin rsm (The Congregation)

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