

“Go Green” April 26, 2009

April 22nd was Earth Day, at least it was as we celebrate it here in the U.S. However, in Indiana, yesterday, the 25th, was actually the day that was designated for our celebration, and some of us may even have attended or participated in all the festivities that went on downtown. I'm well aware that there are those who aren't convinced we have a global crisis when it comes to our environment, and that this is just some sort of political game. We're all entitled to our own opinions.

Yet, I think most of us, even if we have our doubts about the severity of such a crisis, we would have problems denying that we in one way or another have been pretty abusive when it comes to our environment. Agree or not, we probably have to acknowledge that we've spent years allowing our desire for the almighty dollar and for profitable businesses to lead us toward neglect of the world around us. If nothing else, it's hard to find very many pieces of land where you and I live that aren't cleared of all the trees and developed into some sort of housing development or business enterprise.

You see, I'm convinced that most of us, myself included, have been hurting our creation in ways that we may not even be aware of, and sometimes in ways that we know, but do anyway. We know now that Styrofoam cups cannot be recycled, and yet I have to admit that often, when we're on the road and stop for a soft drink, that's exactly the kind of cup we wind up getting. “It keeps the soda cooler longer,” we say, and indeed, it does. But just in that one example, you and I are contributing to the trash piles in our communities, not to mention the fact that those Styrofoam cups and “to go” boxes get blown all over our yards when they're put out for trash collection!

And yet, one of the first and most basic responsibilities we were given as human beings was to take care of all of creation. That's what our Bible passage from the first chapter of Genesis tells us; it's straightforward, and hard to argue with. Our passage says this:

God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make

them reflecting our nature

So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,

The birds in the air, the cattle,

And yes, Earth itself,

And every animal that moves on the face of

Earth.”

Regardless of how we read and interpret this version of the creation story, it's pretty clear that we are the ones who are to care for all of creation. I guess I want us today to think about how we're doing with that responsibility, and how we might improve where we fall short.

Let me be clear: I am not turning into some sort of “green” fanatic. It's just that year after year, I become more and more aware of the tons of refuse you and I create as we go about living our lives. When we walk each morning, we see bags and bags and one container after another of all the trash that comes from our house and from those of our friends and neighbors. I'll tell you what—it's pretty amazing to see how much we carry out with just the two of us in our house! I can't imagine what it's like in households that have more than that!

And it's not just the trash we produce; it's my awareness of the increased awareness that a lot of folks around us seem to have. For instance, I have to admit that we're not very good about taking our reusable bag to the grocery when we shop. We almost always ask for paper bags, because that's what we put our newspapers in for recycling purposes. However, every time we go into Trader Joe's, for example, or Whole Foods, or the Farmers' Markets, I notice more and more folks who bring their bags with them, and carry their groceries home in bags that can be used again and again. I wonder if maybe you and I should consider BYOB—“Bringing your own bags.” It's something to think about.

Those are little things—granted, but I think it's the little things like that that you and I could perhaps change about ourselves. Make no mistake; little things DO mean a lot when it comes to protecting, preserving and re-creating our world. So, I'd like us to think about some of the other little things we might consider doing that make a difference.

One of the simplest things is to pick up litter when we see it. Those of us who drive Keystone Avenue sometimes see a woman who's out early in the mornings. She walks up and down the median and the shoulders of the road, picking up the litter that one or more of us threw out the window of the car. I don't know why she does that, but I'll tell you what—it does make things look better along the highway. Most of us notice when something is cluttered and dirty, and we also notice when it's not. We could each play a role in making sure we don't trash our highways and byways, and picking up what we do see. It's a little thing, but it just might help.

We're chewing up the trees in our forests at an unbelievable rate—just for all the paper we consume. How might we alter that habit and help our environment a little bit? Certainly, we can recycle, and I hope all of us are doing that, but there are other things, too. We can use both sides of the paper, rather than just one. That way, we'd use half as much. We could try direct deposit of our paychecks; online banking and paperless billing would help reduce the inflow of paper into our homes. I've only within the last couple of years begun online banking, and not only does it cut the time it takes by probably 80%, but it's easy, too, and I feel as though I'm helping out just a little bit.

Another thing—Mike and I run into a lot of you at Cosco after services on a Sunday. Not only should we all get together for a lunch there to get to know one another better, but there's something you might help us be accountable for. If any of you have ever paid any

attention, you'll notice that we almost always have a huge carton of bottled water in our cart. We started buying water a few years ago after some of the water out of the tap started tasting so bad, and because it helps us drink more water, we've just kept it up.

However, the plastic in those bottles, along with not being so good for us, adds to the recycle load our trash carriers have to care for. Instead, maybe we should make a vow to use refillable containers, and use filtered tap water to fill them. That would be yet another little thing we could do, but it could make a big difference.

We could each help lessen the emissions from our cars if we walked or biked more and drove less. With all the trails that have been constructed in Indianapolis, many of us could walk or ride to work. How would it be if we organized our workplace in such a way that we would bike to work one day a week? Not only would we wind up in better physical shape, we'd save a little money on gasoline, and we'd be helping the environment, too. It would definitely be a win-win.

In that vein, I was both pleased and surprised to see the popularity of the IndyGo commuter buses from Fisher, Carmel and Greenwood into downtown Indy. Part of the reason, I'm sure, was because of the high gas prices, but I'll tell you what, if I had a job where I'd be in one place all day and not have to drive my car to and from work, the hospitals and wherever else I need to go, I'd board that bus in a heartbeat! Just think of all the reading, work or even the extra few minutes of rest we'd get by not having to fight the traffic ourselves, and again, we're reducing the gas emissions and helping our environment.

I said earlier that I hope we're all recycling, but I realize that isn't as easy for some as it is for others. However, over at St. Luke's, there are containers for all kinds of things that can be recycled. There are a couple of bins outside, but inside in the heart of the building, there is an area where we can take old computers, unused cell phones, dead batteries, and other kinds of things that then will be either recycled safely, or given to those who can use them. For example, old cell phones are often refurbished and given to those who are in dangerous domestic situations so they can call for help. We might be making a bigger difference than we could ever imagine just by turning in a cell phone we're no longer using.

Yet another thing we can do is to conserve electricity. A simple way to do that is to turn off the lights when we walk out of the room. We can replace our light bulbs with the energy efficient ones that are so readily available now. There are those who are encouraging us to unplug our appliances when we're not using them, partly for safety's sake, and partly to save energy. We can at least do that with any appliances or electronics that we don't use regularly.

Nickelodeon is asking watchers to turn off their games and gadgets for a minute on Earth Day to symbolize a commitment to helping the environment. And that network also asks kids to turn off TV one day a year and go outside and play. On March 28th at 8:30 pm,

there was even an "Earth Hour" when people all over the world were asked to turn off their lights for 60 minutes. The organizers hoped to have a billion people do that; I don't know if that happened, or not, but it certainly could have made quite a statement of support!

I suspect that some of us are thinking that this is just a lot of bother, and too much trouble to worry about. Some of you may think I'm really meddling, and I'm sorry if that's the case. However, I believe conserving and preservind our planet is our God-given responsibility. It's important, and it's good for us and it's good for the world. If we don't want to do it for ourselves, let's do it for those who follow us. I want our new granddaughter to grow up living in a lush, beautiful world, and appreciating the wonder of the planet on which we live. You and I can help make it so. Are we game?

SONG:

Communion:

Rumi said, "Let the beauty you love be what you do. There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the earth." One of the ways we might "kneel and kiss the earth" is through sharing in a Jewish festival that has gained a lot of ground over the last twenty or so years. It's something that occurs around Earth Day—the act of sharing a meal of fruit and nuts as a visible sign of our desire to heal the earth.

Now this festival is part of a "Rebirthing of the Trees" ceremony, and juice and fruits were chosen to symbolize generation and regeneration of the earth. Fruit comes from living trees and represent the rebirthing part of a tree's life cycle.

So, this morning, you have been asked to pick up some dried fruit from the food table, and something to drink, and we're going to share it together—in a way a different kind of communion—where we can express our gratitude to God for creating this world for us to inhabit, and we can commit ourselves to caring for our planet as God has asked. As we eat and drink, let's promise God that we will be part of the team, and we will do our best to "Go Green."

Closing:

Have a good Sunday, and go in peace. Amen.

