

## 15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A, 7.16.17

Isaiah 55:10-11/Romans 8:18-23/

Matthew 13:1-23

### WHOEVER HAS EARS OUGHT TO HEAR

Whenever I travel back to Ohio and Michigan I'm surprised to find that recycling isn't as prevalent or obvious as it is here. I see paper, plastic and aluminum products being tossed in the same "garbage" can with the food waste. Not wanting to appear the "enlightened Californian" to my siblings and my midwest Oblate confreres, I refrain from saying: "Don't you people recycle?" And, to be honest, there's so much more re-cycling that I can do, that you can do at home, and that we can do here at the parish. Fortunately, for most of us, the blue, green and brown containers have become standard and accepted practice. However, I wonder if we have a taste for why it's vital to take the extra time in attending to what many may only see as an imposed inconvenience. Do we understand recycling as a spiritual act?



A new story is breaking into human consciousness, a story so enticing, awesome and wondrous that we can again be held captive, finding meaning and renewed zest for life. This "new story" isn't a fairy tale -- although at times it almost sounds like one -- nor is it just another re-telling of our biblical story from the Book of Genesis. This new story sets the context for all other stories, whether personal, social, cultural or religious. It's a setting so vast it encompasses them all, the very universe itself. We could say of this story what Jesus

urged in today's parable: *Whoever has ears ought to hear!*

You and I are part of the first generation of people who know that the universe has a history and that we, along with everything else, are participating in a very long and utterly marvelous story. At the end of the nineteenth century human beings did not know that the stars are organized into galaxies, and they hadn't imagined that gravity could be merely an aspect of how space and time are arranged. They didn't know how atoms or stars work, and they had heard of neither quantum theory nor the atomic nucleus. Neither did they know that the continents move, or that genetic information is stored in DNA, and they had only the faintest notions of the history of life on Earth. Beyond this, the idea that the universe has a history would, had they heard it, have seemed almost inconceivable.



You and I are only a miniscule part of this unfolding story; we're specks of cosmic dust in the vast expanse of the universe: a universe whose origins are determined to be 13.7 billion years ago; a planet called Earth which began 4 billion years ago; bacteria, the foundations of organic life, which began 2 billion years ago; and our first human ancestors who emerged 7 million years ago. And yet, we've been so graced by God that we can be conscious of our role, aware of the job description God has given us to be "good stewards" of this corner of the cosmos into which God has placed us. While it's called the "new story" there are those who sensed it a long time ago. Throughout the ages there

have been prophets and mystics who have recognized, and tried to communicate that the spiritual is most visible in the interconnectedness of the whole of existence. In the twelfth century, the poet and mystic Hildegard von Bingen offered her prayer in these words: *'O Holy Spirit, You are the mighty way in which every thing that is in the heavens, on the earth, and under the earth, is penetrated with connectedness, is permeated with relatedness.'*

Others, down to the present day, have expressed the same sentiment in the language of their own time. St. Augustine said that there are two books of revelation – the scriptures and nature. If we listen attentively to our scriptures we can hear hints and see glimpses of a grand design that goes far beyond our immediate concern for the human race. St. Paul, in his sweeping statement in the letter to the Romans, lifts everything into God's grace. Listen to a fresh rendering of our second reading from Eugene Peterson's translation of the Bible called "The Message:"

*The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens. All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance.*

We've come to understand that Nature is not only a tool that can give us insight into revelation; nature itself is a revelation of God. God influences the cosmos by presenting before it new ways of becoming itself. The world is constantly evolving because God is more interested in adventure than in preserving the status quo.

When Jesus, the master storyteller, addressed the crowds, he looked around at creation to make his point -- the natural processes of growth – how the seed, randomly scattered, took root in the soil, not in all soil, but in that which was receptive. The result was stupendous: an unimaginable abundance of rich harvest.

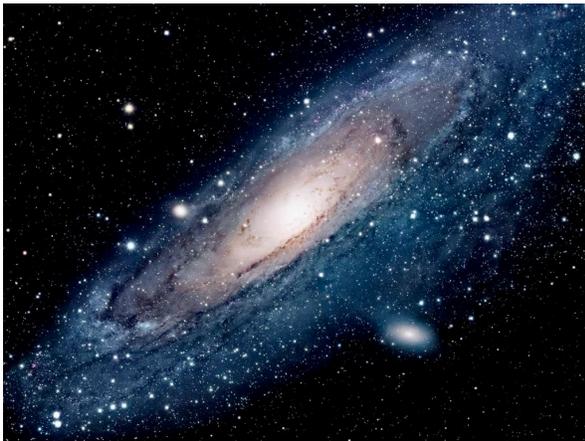
If Jesus were to look around at nature today, from what images would he draw? To know of global warming and the toxic wastes that fill our rivers and oceans, to see oil spills and air pollution, to know that species of animals are disappearing at alarming rates, to know of an Antarctic ice shelf that has existed for thousands of years and is about to shed a 1,000-foot-thick block of ice that's roughly the size of Delaware, and that many places of our globe are in peril from the destruction of the rain forests and the unbridled usurping of natural resources. Would Jesus be able to point to the lilies of the field and the birds in the air in the same way?



Would the prophet Isaiah be able to use the rain and the snow watering the earth as an appropriate metaphor to describe the Word of God coming down to give us life? Or would acid rain which can take the form of snow, fog, and tiny bits of dry material that settle to Earth, with high levels of nitric and sulfuric acids, make the prophet's metaphor and Jesus' parable inaccurate and even obsolete.

Our times are filled with peril and possibility. The New Story – recognizing the planet we share with all creatures and working to sustain it for future generations - suggests not only a viable path into the future. It also entices us to embrace the journey with energy and commitment. Pope Francis' encyclical, *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')* is addressed to "every person living on this planet" for an inclusive dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. Pope Francis calls the Church and the world to acknowledge the urgency of our environmental challenges and to join him in embarking on a new path. This encyclical is written with both hope and resolve, looking to our common future with candor and humility. If we have ears to hear, questions are raised for each of us is:

- What is my role in telling this “new story?”
- Given that I’m just a single seed, planted in my little corner of this amazing garden called “earth,” how can I make a difference?
- Do I enhance or impede the environment of which I’m a part?



In responding, I recognize that I’m not separate from any other part, person, or event in the world. I’m interacting with, responding to every other part. Here we meet our faith in the message and person of Jesus. He boldly carried the awareness of blessing, mystery and relationship, and further, demanded that we wake up to the

cosmos, whose binding thread was, and is, love. Do I love with the intention of the Whole in mind? with all of creation that is groaning with labor pains until now – eager to bring to birth the glory of God alive in all this universe even as it shines forth on the face of each of us.

*John Kasper, osfs*