



Thanksgiving Day Message - Sunday, November 22, 2020

Mother Earth, Sustainability and The Honorable Harvest

Greetings Saints. Mona and I are most grateful to be with you again as we worship together and say, "Thank You." Thank you to Creator for birthing us. Thank you to our Earth Mother for sustaining us, and for Jesus and Sacred Spirit for continuing to inspire us to be "better humans." This Thanksgiving we have much that challenges us, annoys us, creates anxiety, stress, confrontations and emotional, societal, and spiritual turbulence. Yet amid all this...we can and should give thanks. In today's Gospel story we see the Lepers. In 1st Century Israel, Lepers were the absolute and irrefutable bottom of the societal barrel. Isolated, scorned, disrespected and abandoned, they were seen as both physically and spiritually unclean. In the 1st Century Jewish world view, illness came as a punishment from God, for not staying true to "the Law." Either the sick person transgressed the Law, or the parents or ancestors did, and thusly, the lepers in the story are stricken. Yet the Leper continues to hope, and we hear today about that answering of the Leper's Prayer. This miracle for the Lepers is like winning the societal, spiritual and physical lottery. The "normal" life, which others have taken for granted is now firmly within their grasp. Elated, most ran off to begin their new life...only one returned to offer grateful and gracious thanks for his new sustainable life of grace. Today like the Leper, no matter how bad we think it is...or how bad we think we have it. If this Leper can hope...so can we. All we need to do today is look around. Reason for gratitude is everywhere. Nature and the Circle of Life are everywhere around us.

Today we prayed the "Words before all Words" First Nations call to be thankful to our World -- physical and spiritual -- and all that is in it. This is the traditional Indigenous First Nations prayer of thanks for a sustainable and collaborative view of thing.

In the dominant culture, one day set aside to honor the Earth. Every year on April 22nd, we mark the anniversary of the modern environmental movement in 1970. This past April was the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day Celebration. But in

the Indigenous world, every day is Earth Day. Every day is a day of continuous thanks and prayer for what Creator provides and Mother Earth sustains.

How differently we see things....

I remember those early years of the Environmental “movement.” Those early years were indeed difficult. In the decades leading up to the first Earth Day, Americans were consuming vast amounts of leaded gas through massive and inefficient automobiles. Industry belched out smoke and sludge with little fear of the consequences from either the law or bad press. Air pollution was commonly accepted as the smell of prosperity. Until this point, mainstream America remained largely oblivious to environmental concerns and how a polluted environment threatens human health. Then we had some very strong reality checks. Love Canal where buried dioxin contaminated water, plants and people. The Cuyahoga River in Cleveland actually caught fire due to oil pollution. The near meltdown of Three Mile Island nuclear power station in Pennsylvania made us collectively gasp, and rethink how we generate electricity. Rachel Carson’s classic book “Silent Spring” brought into focus the legacy of DDT and its effects on our Winged Ones. And so, our dominant culture said for just a moment, “Enough” and we humans began to view our relationship with the natural world in a different way... a more “circular” way, more steward-like... where humans do not “dominate” the natural world as the Genesis creation story says. Rejecting the view that the natural world seen to be there “for our exclusive use” as humans. A “throw-away” world, and “one-time-use” world.

This was a time when we began to realize something that First Nations culture had known, spoke about and prayed and sang about for generations. We are all here together, in collaboration not competition. Our Earth Mother providing all we need yet requiring that we respect the gifts of Air, Water, Plants and Animals. Making decisions not for today, or tomorrow or even for this generation. But wise decisions that retain, maintain and sustain for 7 generations.

But Saints, we only see to be able to maintain for so long and then our “colonizing” mentality, our take it all now DNA seems to kick back in and our respect for Mother Earth wanes and sags and ultimately disappears as the New Moon. The United States is now the world’s number one plastic waste polluter. Only 1/10 of 1% of America’s plastic waste actually gets recycled. Most is baled up

and shipped to China where it is either burned for industrial fuel or discarded at sea. Our colonial mindset cannot conceive of a solution where environmental caregiving and economic prosperity are not mutually exclusive of one another. We wander cyclically as a society between the two extremes. Learning no lessons from the environmental catastrophes and near misses of the 1970's but long to repeat them. Drilling in the Artic Preserve, new offshore drilling leases, rollback of our Air Quality standards, removing the protections for our Wetlands, the birthplace of an untold number and variety of species, watching our Glaciers melt away. Oh, but we are a smart people. We are a nation of problem solvers. We have to be because we are also a nation of problem creators. I continually hear, "We can and will self-regulate." This from the exterminators of the Buffalo Nation that that left a million rotting bison carcasses stinking on the Great Plains so that Englishmen and Bostonians could wear a top hat. Self-regulation is not in a colonizer's DNA, only taking...only more. Saying thank you is not in the colonial lexicon.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We are a smart people, but we need to become a wise people. And so out of deep respect for our Earth Mother, on this Thanksgiving, let us be like the one leper who returned to Jesus offer gratitude for a new, clean and sustainable life and the life of his yet unborn ones and the next 7 generations that would thrive. I thought is appropriate to re-visit a strong First Nations' Learning. It is the "Rules for an Honorable Harvest...reminding us that we are in relationship with the Natural World and certain rules need to apply if we are to nurture and sustain that loving relationship.

And so, as you read this for the first time or re-read it for the hundredth time...breathe deeply. Read and Breathe in gratitude for blessed Air, and Water, and Plants and Animals. For our collaboration and the commitment to renew our world, not just for tomorrow but for our Children in the 7th Generation.

Blessings and Happy Thanksgiving



Rules for the Honorable Harvest

The Honorable Harvest is a covenant of reciprocity between humans and Mother Earth...

Introduce yourself. Be accountable as the one who come asking for life.

Ask permission before taking. Abide by the answer.

Never take the first. Never take the last.

Harvest in a way that minimizes harm.

Take only what you need, never more than half.

Leave some for others.

Respectfully use everything you take.

Take only that which is given to you.

Share, as Mother Earth has shared with you.

Be grateful

Give a gift in reciprocity for what you have taken.

Sustain the Ones who sustain you, and the earth will last forever.