

Prayer Service for Earth Day 2021

The following prayer service was compiled by the Care for Creation group at Balally Parish in Dublin, Ireland in celebration of Earth Day on April 22nd 2021. It includes a reflection by Fr. Dermot Lane.

This text could be adapted to mark other key moments in the environmental calendar such as the World Day of Prayer for Creation (1st Sept); Earth Hour (March 26th), World Environment Day (June 5th); World Biodiversity Day (May 22nd) etc.

With many thanks to the Care for Creation team in Balally for sharing this beautiful resource. You can view a recording of this service here:

<https://www.churchservices.tv/balally/archive/recordings/ce16EXJYjv9lrwm>



Music: Hildegard of Bingen's O Eucharist (globe placed before altar)

1. Introduction and welcome

Welcome everyone to this time of prayer, reflection poetry and music to celebrate God's creation for Earth Day. We have just been listening to the music from the 12th century Theologian and mystic, Hildegard of Bingen. In much of her writing and musical compositions she celebrated the beauty of God's Creation. Hildegard emphasised the harmony of creation the intimate connection between the natural world and the human being, the interconnectedness of all creatures. She was prophetic in her description of the ecological devastation which would result from our abuse of the Earth when she warned that 'in the people that were meant to be green there will be no more life of any kind only shrivelled bareness.' Let us hear more of Hildegard's words:

2. Reading: from Hildegard of Bingen

Glance at the sun. See the moon and stars.
Gaze at the beauty of Earth's greenings.
Now think what delight God gives to humankind.
But we are to work with it.
For without it we cannot survive.

3. Introduction to Reading from Laudato Si

Hildegard's prophetic words forecast what scientists are telling us today: that we must work with the earth, and act now, if we are to preserve our world for future generations. The theme of Earth Day 2021, "Restore the Earth", is an urgent task for us today, when our earth is under great threat from the climate change and loss of biodiversity which we humans have caused by our abuse of our earth. In his encyclical 'Laudato Si' Pope Francis reminds us of this:

4. Reading from Laudato Si:

Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last 200 years. Each year sees the disappearance of hundreds of plants and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up?

5. Reading from the Book of Job 12:7-10

But ask the animals, and they will teach you: the birds of the air, and they will tell you; ask the plants of the earth and they will teach you; and the fish of the sea will declare to you. Who among all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this?

6. Sung: Psalm 98 “All the ends of the Earth”

7. Romans 8:18-26

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility; not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from the bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now; and not only creation but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

8. Reflection by Fr. Dermot Lane

Before lockdown, that is before the onset of the global pandemic, the sounds of nature were drowned out from our ears by the noise of traffic and the aviation industry. And then during lockdown we began to hear the sounds of nature that we had forgotten existed. For example, we began to hear the forgotten sounds of the birds: their twitters and chirping, their flirtatious flying around and their joyful celebrations. If you listen carefully there is a great variety of bird- voices vying for attention, especially in the morning time.

Some people describe this as the “dawn chorus”, a kind of choral symphony. Some of it is very cheerful and happy, but some of it is painful and mournful.

And why, you might ask, would you pay much attention to the birds of the air during a pandemic, especially since there is so much pain and suffering and death around us. In our reading from the book of Job we were instructed:

*“Ask the animals, they will teach you,
listen to the birds of the air and they will tell you,
speak to the earth and it will teach you,
let the fish in the sea inform you”.*



If you pay close attention to the community of creation, you will discover something about the creator. Look at the natural world around you and you will learn something about the generous creativity of God.

So let us listen to the birds of the air for a few moments. When we do that, we hear a great variety of voices among the birds, some very positive, very cheerful and celebratory, but alas some are shrill, soulful and sorrowful.

Close your eyes,

Imagine for a moment you are in a garden, or a park, or a mountaintop, and this is what you might hear: https://youtu.be/bfVR7_nsQ7w (recording of Dawn Chorus Bird Song. County Laois, Ireland.)

These sounds come from the birds in Laois. They are positive and happy. Some would call their song a dawn chorus, especially at this time of year. Others would say that these birds are praising God their creator.

But there is another sound coming from the birds and that is found in our 2nd reading. Paul's letter to the Romans talks about the sound of creation, that is, groaning of creation in labour pains and then he goes on to say that we too, groan inwardly. This groaning of creation, this lament, this suffering, can also be found among the birds of the air. Let us take the Curlew as an example of a bird groaning. In Ireland, the curlew is now listed as an endangered species. In the last 30 years there has been a 96% decline in the curlew population. Again, let me suggest you close your eyes, and imagine you are in a wood or on the top of a mountain

So let's listen to the Curlew and see what the Curlew is saying to us today:

- https://youtu.be/w3UBH_Mhttps://youtu.be/w3UBH_M_LGk_LGk
- Birds of Ireland: The Curlew & its haunting song

The sound of the Curlew is haunting, sad and painful. And why? There are now at this time **only** 150 curlew couples left in Ireland. The curlew is calling on all of us to act now, to take account of their decline, and to do something to save this endangered species. So why are they endangered?

Because we humans have invaded their natural habitat, we have levelled the hedges, and cut down the wood lands where they nest and rest. The decline of the Curlew family has been caused by the breakdown of biodiversity, and this is caused by climate change, which in turn is caused by global warming, which as we know is caused by human beings.

Remember how Pope Francis is always reminding us that everything is related, interconnected and interdependent. The first category of birdsong, the birds from Laois, Co Leitrim, are positive, uplifting and inspiring, inviting all of us to join in their symphony of praise. Some call these up lifting sounds a kind of cosmic liturgy: nature praising God.

And then, the 2nd category of sounds, the groaning of creation, captured by the cry of the Curlew, is a kind of lament which is haunting, and so so sad. To sum up, on this Earth Day, we are invited to hear the positive and negative sounds of the earth community. In particular we are called to hear nature's praise of God's, especially in the songs of the birds.

And secondly, we are invited to hear the groaning of creation, especially within the bird community, and above all the lament of the curlew who is threatened with extinction because of our extravagant lifestyles, Amen

9. Poem: Invitation

Oh do you have time to linger for just a little while
out of your busy very important day
for the goldfinches that have gathered
in a field of thistles for a musical battle,
to see who can sing the highest note, or the lowest,
or the most expressive of mirth, or the most tender?
Their strong blunt beaks drink the air as they strive melodiously,
not for your sake and not for mine, and not for the sake of winning,
but for sheer delight and gratitude- believe us, they say,
it is a serious thing just to be alive on this fresh morning
In this broken world.
I beg of you, do not walk by without pausing
to attend to this rather ridiculous performance.
It could mean something. It could mean everything.
Or it could be what we mean when we say:* *We must change our life.*

10. Instrumental Music: Spring, Vivaldi

11. Reading from Laudato Si paragraphs 32-33:

The earth's resources are being plundered because of short-sighted approaches to the economy, commerce and production. The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses. Different species contain genes which could be key resources in years ahead for meeting human needs and regulating environmental problems.

It is not enough, however, to think of different species merely as potential 'resources' to be exploited, while overlooking the fact that they have value in themselves. Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plants and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they will have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us.

12. Reflection: Chief Seattle

Every part of the earth is sacred, every shining pine needle, every sandy shore
Every mist in the dark woods, every clearing and humming insect is holy.
The rocky crest, the juices of the meadow, the beasts and all the people,
All belong to the same family.
Teach your children that the earth is our mother;
Whatever befalls the earth befalls the children of the earth.
The water's murmur is the voice of our father's father,
We are part of the earth, and the earth is part of us.
The rivers are our brothers; they quench our thirst.
The perfumed flowers are our sisters.
The air is precious for all of us share the same breath.
The wind that gave our grandparents breath
Also receives their last sigh.
The wind gave our children the spirit of life.
This we know: the earth does not belong to us;
We belong to the earth.
This we know: all things are connected. Our God is the same God,
Whose compassion is equal for all.
For we did not weave the web of life: we are merely a strand in it.

Let us give thanks for the web in the circle that connects us.

Thanks be to God, the God of all.

13. Prayer of Gratitude for the Earth:

For the marvellous grace of your creation, we pour out our thanks to you God.

For sun and moon and stars,

For rain and dew and winds,

For winter cold and summer heat.

We praise you God for mountains and hills,

For springs and valleys,

For rivers and seas.

We praise you God, for plants growing in earth and in water,

For life inhabiting lakes and seas, for life creeping in soils and land,

For creatures living in wetlands and waters,

For lifeline flying above earth and sea,

For beasts dwelling in woods and fields.

How many and how wonderful are your works, O Lord.

14. Prayers of thanksgiving and repentance

Creator God, we thank you for the miraculous gift of creation. We thank you for the changing seasons; for the colour and scent of flowers and herbs, of grass and trees; we thank you for sun and rain which ensure the never-failing fruitfulness of the earth; Make us more conscious of our responsibility to respect and care for your creation. Lord have mercy.

We confess that the way we live today is changing the climate, the seas, and the balance of life, dispossessing the poor and future generations. Help us to be good neighbours and to recognise that our relationships are broken, and the planet's ecosystems are fractured. Lord have mercy,

We see that the whole of creation is struggling with changing conditions and our communities are fragmented by inequality and division. Help us to recognise that our lifestyles already threaten the livelihood of the poorest and most vulnerable citizens of the world. We pray that we may recognise our responsibility to seek global justice so that all citizens of the world may live in justice and peace. Lord have mercy,

15. Prayers of Faithful:

Creator God, You gave us responsibility for the earth, a world of riches and delight. Create in us a desire to live sustainably, so that those who follow after us may enjoy the fruits of your creation. Lord hear us,

Creator God, we give thanks for this wonderful fragile earth that we share with the whole community of life. Transform our hearts and minds that we may learn to care and share, to walk lightly on the earth with gentleness and love, respecting all forms of life. Lord hear us.

Lord, we pray for the healing of our wounded world and for all those whose lives and livelihoods are being devastated by climate change. Lord hear us

Creator God, in the lives we lead and the choices we make help us to be mindful of our impact on the world and its people near and far, now and in future generations. Lord hear us

16. Final Prayer:

Let us go forth now to heed the cry of the earth and of the poor, to care for God's world, to prepare for a better future, for the coming of God's kingdom of justice, love, peace, and beauty. Amen

17. John Rutter's 'For the beauty of the Earth'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxr8QBPq1z0>

