

CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME - A NEW WORK OF MERCY



AT the opening of the Mercy Day Mass at Mercy International last month, Astrid Lambert from Auckland pours water into a small pool in front of the altar in the Baggot Street chapel, a symbol of how the Mercy streams from around the world return to their source for renewal and mutual enrichment.

PARTICIPATING in this year's Mercy Day Mass at Baggot Street, Dublin, was Astrid Lambert, Group Administrator of Tiaki Manatū, the Mercy Ministries Trust based in Auckland. Her role was to carry in procession a vessel of water, accompanied by representatives of the other Mercy Congregations around the world, and pour it into a water feature incorporating a small fountain, in front of the altar.

The priest presiding at the Eucharist used the water to sprinkle those assembled in the chapel as a reminder of their baptismal commitment and of their call to be door-keepers of Mercy, in a year when every Mercy door is expected to open wherever it needs to. The following day, Astrid joined a group of Mercy leaders from around the world, among them Bernadette Stockman, principal of St Mary's College in Auckland, for a week-long Ethos pilgrimage for partners in Mercy.

The vessels carried by Astrid and her six colleagues at this year's Mercy Day Mass were first used in 1994, when the House of Mercy, built by Catherine McAuley and opened in 1827, was rededicated as the Mercy International Centre. The water, carried from around the globe by sisters attending that ceremony, was poured into a rill in the garden where Catherine is buried; the rill became a symbol of the worldwide streams of Mercy returning to their source and renewing and enriching each other.

Water is also a powerful symbol of our responsibility to care for creation, and to ensure that this source of life for all living creatures is kept fresh and clean, free of pollutants that can threaten humans and other species. Here in New Zealand, we were sharply reminded of this fact last month by a gastric bug that affected hundreds in Havelock North, after the town's water supply became contaminated.

Pope Francis spoke of our need to care for the environment in his message on September 1 for the second World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, an event which we now share with the Orthodox and other Christian churches as we reflect together on our vocation as stewards of the earth and its fragile resources. The day has been stretched out by many believers to a whole month, a 'season of creation' that reaches from the beginning of September to October 4, the feast of St Francis of Assisi whose famous canticle praising Sister Water, Brother Sun and Mother Earth identifies him as the patron of the environment. "God gave us the earth 'to till and to keep' (Gen 2:15) in a balanced and respectful way," said the pope. "To till too much, to keep too little, is to sin."

It's not often that anything new is added to the great body of teaching that Catholics believe and practise. But Pope Francis did so in his message on Care for Creation. He proposed that to the time-honoured list of corporal and spiritual works of mercy, most of them drawn from the teachings of Jesus, another be added. "If we look at the works of mercy as a whole, we see that the object of mercy is human life itself and everything it embraces," wrote the pope. "So let me propose a complement to the two traditional sets of seven: may the works of mercy also include care for our common home."

As a spiritual work of mercy, care for our common home calls for "a grateful contemplation of God's world," Pope Francis said. "As a corporal work of mercy, care for our common home requires simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness and makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world."

This involves us in an ecological examination of conscience which leads to a firm purpose of amendment, said the pope. And he went on to list some of the concrete ways of thinking and acting which he suggested in his letter *Laudato Si'*: "avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can be consumed, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights." We must not think these efforts are too small to improve our world, Francis wrote. There is a goodness here, "albeit unseen, which inevitably tends to spread," encouraging a prophetic lifestyle which "is free of the obsession with consumption." (LS, 212, 222)

So there's the challenge of Mercy Day this year: an ecological conversion which breaks the logic of greed and selfishness and makes itself felt "in every action that seeks to build a better world." In your Mercy ministry, where is this already happening, and how might you make it happen more?

Taihoa, spare a moment.....

You're invited to end this reflection by pondering, either alone or with someone who shares your commitment to Mercy, on this simple ecological examination of conscience...

- *All creation reflects the goodness and beauty of God the creator. Where were you most aware of this today?*
- *Can you suggest one practical way in which you have made a deliberate effort to care for creation today?*
- *What is one simple step you might take to improve your relationship with Papatūānuku Mother Earth and its fragile resources?*

- Dennis Horton

He Inoi: Prayer

*E Te Atua ki nga rawakore
God of the poor,
help us to rescue
the abandoned and forgotten
of this earth,
who are so precious in your eyes.*

*E Te Atua aroha – God of love,
show us our place in this world
as channels of your compassion
for all the creatures of this earth.*

*E Te Atua atawhai – God of mercy,
may we receive your forgiveness
and convey your mercy
throughout our common home.*

***– Pope Francis (adapted)
World Day of Prayer
for the Care for Creation***