

Earth Sunday Homily All Saints 8:00 service, April 27, 2025

Earth Day 2025: Gratitude for and Celebration of Creation

In the name of the God the Creator, the Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

Welcome to Earth Sunday, our celebration here at All Saints of Earth Day 2025, which was this past Tuesday on April 22nd. Today is also Beckwith Sunday. Camp Beckwith is our diocesan retreat center, and it is one of my favorite places to visit. Set back in the woods and sitting on Weeks Bay, Beckwith is full of natural beauty: the beach, a labyrinth, the new “Forest bathing” trail through the woods, and more. We are grateful for and we celebrate Beckwith today.

Earth Day is an annual worldwide salute to the planet and its environment. Here is the history: On April 22 of 1970 twenty million people took to the streets and college campuses in hundreds of cities to protest environmental ignorance and to demand a new way forward to protect the Earth. That first Earth Day is largely credited as one the key moments that launched the modern environmental movement, including the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency later that year, in December of 1970. Prior to that day, by 1969 Senator Gaylord Nelson, a Democrat from Wisconsin, had long been concerned about, as he put it “the deteriorating environment in the United States.” The passionate student protests against the Viet Nam War inspired Nelson to meld this energy of these student protests with the emerging public consciousness about air and water pollution. The first Earth Day was established on April 22 of 1970. And so now, 55 years later we once again join in this international celebration of our home Earth. The theme this year is “Our Power, Our Planet,” to promote and encourage the use of renewable energy sources: solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and tidal generated energy, moving away from fossil fuels the use of which has caused so much of the environmental devastation we are now seeing.

I believe that this concern for our environment—for the health of our home Earth—can be and is enhanced by our understanding of the unity of everything within the creation. We are all part of this creation, not separate from it. We are literally created from the same “stuff” that every living thing is created from. We are not the ultimate rulers of creation—rather, we are materially and spiritually merely participants in this ongoing process of creation. I think that looking at the history of our home Earth helps us to develop—to assimilate and embody—a love for and sense of communion with all of creation. Where did this home of ours, the Earth, come from? How did our natural world come to be? Where did we the Homo sapiens species come from? How did our consciousness and with it our desire to comprehend the universe and its creator come to be? We have reached a point of crisis in this ongoing evolutionary process of life on this beautiful home of ours, Earth. Today we are here in part to lament upon the damage we have done to creation—and to say the least we have done a lot that has damaged this home of ours—but mostly today we are here to celebrate creation, and to express our gratitude for this gift of life we are all a part of.

Let’s step back in time, in fact way back, to what now through our scientific methods is our best understanding of our origin. It all began about 13.7 billion years ago. In his book The First Three Minutes the Nobel-peace prize physicist Steven Weinberg (1) tells us it began with a tremendous explosion of energy filling what then became rapidly expanding space. At about one-hundredth of a second the temperature was about two hundred billion degrees. Matter at this point consisted of elementary particles which included electrons and later photons, and the universe was filled with light. This took about one-tenth of a second. After three minutes the universe cooled to about two billion degrees. Then, after a few hundred thousand years it was cool enough for gases of hydrogen and helium to form, and that gas under the influence of gravity began to condense and clump together to form the galaxies and stars of the still ever expanding present universe. Incredibly the ingredients with which the stars

would begin their life and ultimately our lives would be just those that formed in the first three minutes. Over billions of years galaxies formed, supernova stars exploded releasing elements into the universe, and about 5 billion years ago the solar system and earth were born of the particles cast out into space by these exploding stars, supernova explosions that gave birth to galaxies and stars and to our own solar system. Earth was born amidst this unfathomable universe of energy and new life. Plant and animal life formed in the primordial seas about 3 billion years ago, and plants emerged onto land about 600 million years ago. Luxuriant foliage developed. One hundred million years ago flowers appeared, and the full beauty of Earth began to manifest itself. Birds appeared, and later mammals, both on land and in the sea. And then 200,000 years ago the evolutionary process brought about the human mode of being, the Homo sapiens, which means “wise ones.” With it came the development of a consciousness that allowed the earth to reflect upon itself, humanity as the means for this living organism Earth to awaken to an intellectual understanding of itself. Awe and mystery and search for meaning led to the development humanity’s attempts to connect with the creator, first within indigenous people, and later with the development of religious traditions. Then just a few centuries ago a new stage of scientific development took place, which brought about a technological dominance of the earth out of which humanity had emerged. Sadly and tragically the consequent ability of humans to affect the functioning of the planet Earth has had disastrous consequences, and that is where we find ourselves today. (2) It has been quite the journey. Where do we go next?

I tell this creation story as a background to the message I want to deliver with this homily about The Unity of Creation. I tell it in the hope that it helps us to understand the foundational truth that the universe itself—the universe as the expression and revelation of the Creator God—is the reference point, that being the criterion by which all of creation is evaluated and respected and treated. This incredible story—the story of our origin and that of all creation—certainly

tells us that. But modern humanity has come to see itself as the reference point. It has become the self-absorbed dominant force, the presumed interests and needs of which should dominate the concerns and health, indeed the life of the created world including our home Earth. What has developed is an aggressive seemingly un-conscious attitude that has caused and permitted humans to abuse, to destroy, and to alter the life-giving natural processes which through the billions of years of evolution Earth has developed to express itself. Sadly, our name Homo sapiens, “wise ones,” has not proved to be an accurate description. In keeping with the theme “Our Power, Our Planet” for Earth Day this year, we must acknowledge that much of the damage stems directly from the indiscriminate use of fossil fuels for energy. And this devastation has happened so quickly, starting with the Industrial Revolution in 1760. How quickly is that in the expanse of time? If we look at the entire process as occurring in one year, and the original creation moment as January 1st, humanity’s role in it would be a split-second in the last minute of December 31st.

Our calling now is to re-establish a loving relationship with the rest of creation. We are related to all of life, all having the same origin—the same source that we as Christians call The Christ that was present at the beginning, at that moment almost 14 billion years ago, the first incarnation, of kenosis, God’s self-emptying into creation. The cosmic Christ in all things. Where do we see it? Everywhere! Jesus puts it well in the gospel of Thomas: “Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.” Animals of all types—those on and beneath the ground, in the sky, and in the water—the plants, the trees, and the living Earth are all our relatives. We are made of the same elements. We share almost exactly the same DNA. There is one life, one breath that we all breathe. Everything is interrelated and interdependent. We are part of one living system, a unified whole. Barbara Brown Taylor calls it “The Luminous Web,” and God is in all of it. We must live in harmony with the rest of creation. This means that we reject attitudes and beliefs that place us above and separate

from the natural world. The universe itself is the reference point, not us. What is needed is a new spiritual communion with Earth, a spirituality born of our source the Creator, from whom came the elements of the universe, our solar system, Earth, and out of the Earth ourselves.

[In closing today, I want to share a few quotes that I found to be meaningful in our celebration of the Earth and its environment:

From the farmer and environmental activist Wendell Berry: “The Earth is what we all have in common.”

From the Native American proverb: “We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors. We borrow it from our children.”

From Albert Einstein: “Look deep into nature and then you will understand everything better.”

From the Dalai Lama: “It is our collective and individual responsibility to preserve and tend to the world in which we all live.”]

And finally, today we also celebrate the life of Pope Francis, from whom you heard in one of the readings today. Pope Francis consistently called for more respect for nature, and made many appeals in defense of the environment. He called the destruction of South America’s rain forests and other forms of environmental exploitation a “sin of modern times.” He said: “When I look at America, also my own homeland South America...at so many forests, all cut, that have become land that can no longer give life...this is our sin, exploiting the Earth and not allowing her to give us what she has within her.”

Perhaps this understanding of our unity with every created thing can lead us back to once again becoming an integral part of rather than separate from and somehow “above” the rest of creation; perhaps to a renewed sense of responsibility for and an active role in its care, its healing, its return to life. God, we are grateful for this incredibly beautiful home of ours, Earth. Help us to experience its awesome beauty, and to know You as its source, and ours. We give thanks for this gift of life.

Rev. Bob Donnell

1 The First Three Minutes, Steven Weinberg

2 The Sacred Universe, Thomas Berry