

5 June 2014
World Environment Day



A Day of Prayer and Reflection

A MEMORY
THE SURVIVOR TREE

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In June 2013, Sister Helen Ojario and I walked from the Staten Island Ferry to the site of the 9/11 Memorial. It was an exquisite day, cool and clear and the walk was invigorating, but I was tired when we arrived. We made our way through the crowds to the park-like area which surrounds the two waterfalls marking the sites where the north and south towers once stood. We rested for a while sitting on the grass near the south pool. I began to read the brochure we were given upon entering, opening it to a section entitled, "Survivor Tree." Loving trees as I do, I eagerly began to read. This is the story:

In the 1970's a Callery pear tree was planted near the original World Trade Center Plaza. In September, 2001 it was severely damaged; the upper portion of the tree was severed from the trunk, leaving a stump about 8 feet high. Workers found it and recognizing that it was still alive, moved it to a park in New York City where it was cared for and grew to a height of 30 feet. New growth sprouted and a shower of white blossoms appeared each spring. In the March of 2010, the tree was uprooted by a severe storm, but again survived. In December of 2010 it was replanted near the site of the original south tower, and is a tribute to the resilience of the survivors of 9/11 --- human beings and nature. The pear tree is surrounded by white swamp oaks.

Moved by the story, I looked up and saw the oaks. Lovely, healthy expressions of the strength of nature, they stood, leaves gleaming in the noonday sun. Looking slightly to my right, I noticed another tree, clearly the pear, with a simple wooden guard rail surrounding it and guide wires for support. Women, men, and children were moving quietly to and from the tree, most standing still for several moments, their arms outstretched to touch a branch, as if in prayer. Helen and I sat quietly too, taking in the utter beauty of the scene.

Then we made our way over to the tree and stood there a few moments our hands resting on the pear tree's branches. We noticed the new growth that had sprouted from the severed branches and a deep wound on the trunk that looked as if it had been burned by the blast. We felt as if we were standing within a prayer, a living manifestation of the irrepressible vigor of creation even in the midst of the evil of destruction and a tribute to the workers who saw life in the midst of chaos and who tended that life back to health --- true caretakers of the creation God has entrusted to us.

A group of young women also attentive to the beauty of the tree, stood nearby. One of them offered to take our picture. It accompanies this introduction to our prayer.

*Beth Fitzpatrick, O. Carm.
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Call to Prayer

Leader: Let us pray.
Gracious God, open our eyes,
All: that we may notice all you have created.
Leader: Open our hearts,
All: that we may respond with care and compassion.

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Opening Song (optional)

Morning Has Broken

Morning has broken, like the first morning.
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing, fresh from the Word.
Sweet the rain's new fall, sunlight from heaven.
Like the first dewfall, on the first grass.
Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden,
Sprung in completeness where His feet pass.
Mine is the sunlight, mine is the morning.
Born of the one light Eden saw play.
Praise with elation, praise every morning;
God's recreation of the new day.
Morning has broken, like the first morning.
Blackbird has spoken, like the first bird.
Praise for the singing, praise for the morning,
Praise for them springing, fresh from the Word.

- Cat Stevens, Lyrics by Eleanor Farjeon

Reader 1:

God's Grandeur

The World is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is scared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil.
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell;
the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs---
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah!
bright wings.

– Gerard Manley Hopkins, S.J.

Pause then Response: There lives the dearest freshness
deep down things.

Reader 1:

A Reading from the Book of Genesis (2:8, 9, 15)

Then the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east
and placed there the one whom he had formed. Out of the
ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were



delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it.

The Word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Pause for silent reflection

Reader II:

A Reading from Pope Francis's Message for World Environment Day, 2013

When we talk about the environment, about creation, my thoughts turn to the first pages of the Bible, the Book of Genesis, which states that God placed man and woman on earth to cultivate and care for it (cf. 2:15). And the question comes to my mind: What does cultivating and caring for the earth mean? Are we truly cultivating and caring for creation? Or are we exploiting and neglecting it? The verb "to cultivate" reminds me of the care that the farmer has for his land so that it bear fruit, and it is shared: how much attention, passion and dedication! Cultivating and caring for creation is God's indication given to each one of us not only at the beginning of history; it is part of God's project; it means nurturing the world with responsibility and transforming it into a garden, a habitable place for everyone.

Pause for silent reflection: In what ways do I disregard creation, expecting it to be fruitful when I have neglected it? In what ways do we do this as a culture? (*Optional sharing*)

Response: Nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.

Reader III:

A reading from the Gospel of Luke (Lk. 13:6-9)

Jesus spoke this parable: A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he came out looking for fruit on it but did not find any. He said to the vinedresser, ‘look here! For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree and found none. Cut it down. Why should it clutter up the ground?’ In answer the man said, ‘Sir, leave it another year, while I hoe around it and manure it; then perhaps it will bear fruit.’”

Pause for silent reflection: How do I cultivate and care for creation? Is there a space that has become more like a garden, because of my attention? (Optional sharing)

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Litany

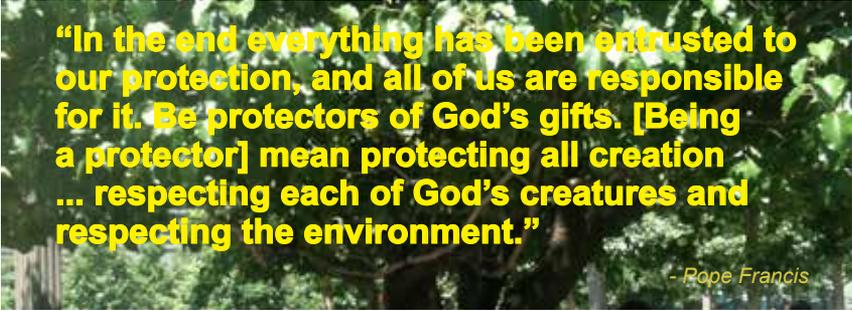
You Have Loved Our Earth, Lord Jesus

You have loved our earth, Lord Jesus,
in the many-colored flowers of the fields
more beautiful than the robes of Solomon,
and in the birds of the sky who worship the Father
by flapping wings and their joyous chirping---
you said they are the signs of God’s providence!

May you be blest, O Lord!

You have loved our earth, Lord Jesus:
When you saw a bird’s nest,
you dreamed of a place to lay your head---
which you had not!

May you be blest, O Lord!



“In the end everything has been entrusted to our protection, and all of us are responsible for it. Be protectors of God’s gifts. [Being a protector] mean protecting all creation ... respecting each of God’s creatures and respecting the environment.”

- Pope Francis

You have loved our earth, Lord Jesus:
You watched the budding wheat,
hurrying to grow day and night,
so as to ripen as surely as your Reign comes.

May you be blest, O Lord!

You have loved our earth Lord Jesus:
You allowed yourself to be caressed by the evening breeze,
which wanders through the byways of Jerusalem,
as mysterious as the passing of your Spirit.

May you be blest, O Lord!

We beg you, Jesus:
Because you have loved our earth,
which has become yours by your birth in Bethlehem,
help us to love it too,
to find in it the traces of your image, to care for it,
to restore what has been damaged
by our human violence.

May you be blest, O Gracious Jesus.

*-Adapted from Lucien Deiss,
“You have Loved Our Earth, Lord Jesus,”*



Closing Hymn:

For the Beauty of the Earth (or any setting to this hymn)

For the beauty of the earth, for the boundless skies,
for the love which from our birth all around us lies,
for the blessings of thy bounty, for thy gracious ways,
Lord of all to thee we sing thankful hymns of praise.

For the beauty of each hour, for the day and night,
hill and valley, tree and flower, moon and stars of light,
for the blessings of thy bounty for thy gracious ways,
Lord of all to thee we sing thankful hymns of praise.

For the joy of every love given on our way,
friends on earth and friends above, all who light our day,
for the blessings of thy bounty, for thy gracious ways,
Lord of all to thee we sing thankful hymns of praise.

- Dan Schutte



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