

July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020

My Dear Parishioners,

The other week I read an article about butterflies; those ‘tokens’ of the resurrection. Not just any butterfly, mind you. The “Quino checkerspot butterfly” that once filled the skies of Southern CA and now are endangered. Their habitat is under threat from development: much of it already turned into housing, business parks and shopping malls. In her collection of essays, “Upstream”, Mary Oliver writes: **“Teach the children...show them daisies and the taste of sassafras and wintergreen...Give them fields and the woods and the possibility of the world salvaged from the Lords of profit”**. (p.8) In other words, give them a taste and appreciation for the earth; this, our common home.



The possibility of the world salvaged from the Lords of profit. It’s this resonating note Pope Francis strikes in his encyclical, *Laudato Si* “On Care for Our Common Home”. This encyclical flies in the face of those obsessed by profit with its ravaging effect. The encyclical’s prophetic vision is rooted in Christ’s teaching. Its full-flowering we see blossoming in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. It has yet to be taken seriously by those in power today; both civic and ecclesiastical. Lords of profit continue to drain the future of this planet; the Quino checkerspot butterfly, a dire portent. Presently, I’m re-reading Peter Matthiessen’s novel, “In Paradise”. It takes place on the grounds at Auschwitz and in the aftermath of the war. The character, Olin, walks through a barrack: **“And somewhere here—this haunts him—a wistful child scrawled on the wall: ‘No butterflies live here.’”** The words capture the hellish hopelessness of war coupled with the resilience of a child who keeps those butterflies in mind.

In a Eucharistic Canon for Sundays in Ordinary Time (and in what was once the Sacramentary, now the Missal after the 2010 revision), the phrase “stewards of creation” was used to define our work as children of God. The way we praise God “day by day for the marvels of your wisdom and power.” In the 2010 revision—a more literal translation of the Latin original, it reads: “to rule in Your Name over all you have made.” It’s less poetic, obviously, and conjures up a message that is vague and easily misunderstood. It is why I would add the word “compassionately” to emphasize what is truly being said if read “between the lines”. So, I found myself in a quandary recently and after receiving the Archbishop’s “Decree and Policies Regarding the Eucharist”; to be implemented in the Seattle Archdiocese at the beginning of Advent, 2020. Regarding the Mass, it reads: **“The language of the liturgy must not be altered (e.g. in the interest of inclusive language or for some other reason)”**. Reading it, I sighed. You see, I’m ‘culpable’ when it comes to such alterations. I do so, not like some iconoclast, but in a way that remains faithful to its ‘fabric’ and meaning. Liturgy was my focus during the final year of theological studies in Rome; taught by Benedictine monks renowned for their wisdom and study in this field. Liturgy without ‘alteration’ renders religion meaningless and sadly misses the point of it all. Why can’t we focus on those weightier matters today? *Laudato Si* a case in point. We ought to focus on what needs to be addressed, what the Holy Father is asking, and in ways that offer creativity and hope within a church and world both endangered and burning, I might add.

Again, in that collection of essays, Mary Oliver recalls a phrase heard years ago at a lecture. It was “inherited responsibility”. And she writes: **“I slipped this phrase from the air and put it into my pocket.”** As a poet, she’s inherited, not wealth, but **“that immeasurable fund of thoughts and ideas from writers and thinkers long gone into the ground...They...lived looking and looking and looking, seeing the apparent and beyond the apparent, wondering, allowing for uncertainty, also grace”**. (pp 57-58) Did not Jesus live in ways similar and who teaches us to do the same? This “inherited responsibility” the Spirit of God awakens within us by the sacramental life; by life itself. As Christians, we have an “inherited responsibility” when it comes to the earth and to one another; not lording over, but as stewards. Religious leaders today easily lose sight of this “inherited responsibility” that goes beyond the exactness of liturgical jots and tittles. We must learn to bend “compassionately” when it comes to the lived reality of others. This responsibility Christ hands on to us reveals a God who colors ‘beyond the lines’ while writing straight with crooked lines; “allowing for uncertainty, also grace” during this journey towards God. The Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel said: **When religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.”**

May God pour out upon the face of the earth grace that inspires. That urges us to live our “inherited responsibility” in ways that make us tokens of the resurrection and within a world salvaged from its undoing.

I wish you well, and with my blessing.

Fr Tim Clark