

4th Sunday of Easter, 25 April 2021

Scriptures: Acts 4:8-12; 1 John 3:1-2; John 10:11-18

Homily: Fr. Ken

The Gospel for this Sunday is a familiar passage, the story of the Good Shepherd. The message is very clear: love your neighbor, serve those in need. One of those acts of love, perhaps the most important in the long run, is to achieve a sustainable environment for now and for our children and for our grandchildren and great grandchildren.

A few days ago, on Thursday, we and the world celebrated the 51st anniversary of Earth Day.

This weekend, thousands of Catholic priests across our country will be giving Earth Day homilies in support of the Catholic Church's call for world leaders to create immediate and equitable solutions to climate change,

Some years ago, Pope Benedict dedicated his entire World Peace Day message to the care of creation, and he called upon the world's political leaders to respond to what he called "the great ecological challenge presented by the climate change crisis". He also expressed disappointment at "the political resistance to combating the degradation of the environment". He, like religious leaders worldwide, was particularly concerned about the impact of climate change on the poor and vulnerable, and the very future of some nations. That same concern is the very concern of Pope Francis today, as explicitly voiced in his seminal 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'*.

Similarly, the United States Catholic Bishops have also declared: "At its core, global climate change...is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment".

At this point, for an in depth understanding including the theological, moral, and ethical perspective, I highly recommend again, that you read and study the encyclical letter of Pope Francis, "*Laudato Si*". (Four years ago, at Christmas 2017, every person, parishioners and visitors alike, who attended our Christmas Masses, received a copy of Pope Francis' encyclical. If for whatever reason you did not receive a copy, extra copies are currently available for you at the Church Rectory.)

It is projected among the nearly unanimous scientific community that if humanity continues on its current path of population growth, increased consumption and waste, advancing deserts and rising seas, by the end of this century, if not sooner, the human family will have reached the point of irrecoverability, with all forms of life disappearing in the following century.

Even today, the lives of 300 million people are directly impacted by climate change, and upwards of 300,000 human lives are lost each year because of climate change. As German Cardinal Karl Lehman noted: "Global climate change probably represents the greatest existential threat for the present and, to a much greater extent, for coming generations, as well as for non-human nature. Consequently, the biological, social, and spatial consequences are as serious challenge for humankind."

Archbishop Rowan Williams noted that climate change was inextricably bound up with a crisis of hope, and that consumerism was responsible both for people's unhappiness and for climate change itself. He said: "The processes of environmental damage have both reflected and intensified a basic spiritual malaise". He further observed that "an indefinite expanding human population is not sustainable...A sustainable future has to mean a containable population". He emphasized that people not only have the moral obligation to care for one another, but for the whole environment as well. He said that religion demonstrated the "tragedy of the shrunken and harried humanity we have shaped ourselves by our obsession with growth and consumption". He concluded: "What we

face today is nothing less than a choice about how genuinely human we want to be; and the role of religious faith in meeting this is first and foremost in setting out a compelling picture of what humanity reconciled with both Creator and Creation might look like”.

So say the bishops. What do the very top scientists of the world say? The Global Humanitarian Forum, in the first-ever comprehensive study of the human impact of climate change, projects that increasing severe heat waves, floods, storms, and forest fires will be responsible for as many as 500,000 deaths annually by the year 2030, making climate change the greatest humanitarian challenge the world now faces. In the words of the late United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, “climate change is the defining challenge of our age”.

Civil unrest may also very well increase. The report states: “Four billion people are vulnerable now, and 500 million are now at extreme risk. Weather-related disasters...bring hunger, disease, poverty, and lost livelihoods. They pose a threat to social and political stability”.

If gas emissions are not brought under control, within 25 years, the report says, 310 million more people will suffer adverse health consequences related to temperature increases, 20 million more people will fall into poverty, and, 75 million more people will be displaced by climate change.

Thus, our time now is pivotal for Earth’s climate. Scientists have warned that humanity has very few years remaining to reverse the rise in greenhouse gas emissions in order to avoid abrupt and catastrophic climate change.

Our responsibility today, to express in words and actions our love for one another as sisters and brothers in God’s worldwide family, is to develop the Christian attitude of stewardship, just like the Good Shepherd in the Gospel story. We have the moral duty as

Christians to be the guardians and shepherds or custodians of creation, developing its gifts. Thus, we are collaborators in an active way in God's work, in the evolution that God placed in the world, so that the gifts of creation are treasured and not destroyed.

It is the message of the Gospel, it is the message of Earth Day, it is our God-given responsibility to safeguard the Earth.

The Catholic Bishops of Europe have stated it well: "As Christians, we should be aware that we are called upon to testify to the hope which fills us, a hope based on Christ, the Good Shepherd. Ecological responsibility fits within this hope: it thus constitutes an essential element of Christian faith relating to creation and redemption".

In conclusion, at its very core, global climate change is fundamentally a moral issue. It is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God's creation and the one human family. Pope Francis stated affirmatively that "on climate change, there is a clear, definitive, and ineluctable ethical imperative to act".

The ethics of climate change is about protecting both the human environment and the natural environment. Not only are we today the first generation to know the era of climate change, but we also may well be the last to do something about it. Indeed, our predecessors had the excuse of ignorance. Our descendants will have the excuse of helplessness. We have no excuse.