

'BLESSINGS & WOES'

6th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C – 17th February 2019

POPE FRANCIS TEACHING ON THE 'OUR FATHER'

Pope Francis on Wednesday, 13 February 2019, continued his teaching on the 'Our Father'. He invited us to continue,

"to learn from Jesus how to pray as he taught.

True prayer is made in the intimate depths of a heart visible only to God.

It is a silent dialogue, like the glance between two people in love.

Yet in this way the Christian does not forget the world,

but rather brings its people and its needs into prayer.

We notice the absence of the word "I" in the "Our Father".

Jesus teaches us instead to pray: "your kingdom come, your will be done"

The second half of the prayer then moves from "your" to "our":

"give us our daily bread; forgive us our trespasses".

This use of the plural shows that Christian prayer

never asks bread for just one person, but always on behalf of others.

In our prayer, then, do we open our hearts to the cry of others?

We are all children of God, and at the end of our lives

we will be judged on how we have loved.

Not a sentimental love but one that is concrete and compassionate,

as seen in God's word: "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers,

you did it to me" (Mt 25:40)."

[Short 2m18s video of Pope Francis](#)

THE GOSPEL OF THE DAY & CREATION: PART 3

In our third of a series of homilies on the Gospel of the day and creation, we know that it is **not my world, my creation.**

We pray to God who created the world, an on-going creation.

As we are created in God's image and likeness,

we have an important role to play.

In that sense, **in partnership with God, it is also our world.**

We are called to care for the earth, to be responsible stewards.

Humbly.

Our prayer for creation also needs to be concrete and compassionate.

Let us take an example.

ARAL SEA

One of the terrible environmental tragedies of the 20th Century and early 21st Century is the **Aral Sea.**

- It was the **fourth largest freshwater lake in the world**
- It was over 66,000 square kilometres

- It received inflow from the Amu Darya river in the south and the Syr Darya river in the north

ARAL SEA – HISTORY OF IMPACT

Many decades ago the Soviet Union decided to divert water into channels for cotton farming. The Sea began to decrease dramatically in size.

Fish life was dying off.

Salt flats increased.

Winds blew the salt over fertile lands, doing incredible damage to crops.

One source estimated around 40 million metric tons of salt.

The Aral Sea no longer exists.

It later was reduced to four smaller seas and salt flats and dried land.

And now there are two smaller sections called the North Aral Sea and the South Aral Sea.

The Soviet Union no longer exists, but the terrible damage was ongoing.

A terrible story of woes.

Turning the blessing of the Sea into woe.

ARAL SEA - TODAY

Today it is the responsibility of Kazakhstan for the North Aral Sea and Uzbekistan for the South Aral Sea.

One of the nations has been more proactive recently and is working more with the international community.

Water depth has increased in the North Aral Sea and salinity has decreased.

Fish life has increased. A new dam was built to help retain water.

International expertise is helping.

We are a world community, called to care for the earth our common home.

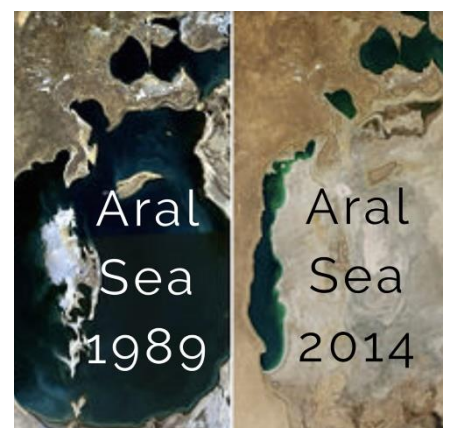
The Aral Sea is a text book case of environmental mismanagement and disaster, of abusing creation, and later, some genuinely trying to make amends.

A story of **blessings** before human decisions abused this gift and turned it into terrible **woes**,

and later again some **blessings** in the northern section as people started to care again,

and continued **woes** still over much of the former Aral Sea.

Let us pray hear the Gospel passage about beatitudes and woes, and then turn to prayer for the former Aral Sea.



BEATITUDES

This Sunday we reflect on blessings and woes section of Luke's Gospel.

'He came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea, Jerusalem, and the coast of Tyre and Sidon.'

We call this text the ***Sermon on the Plain***.

It is not as popular today as the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew's Gospel. Yet it is important to understand.

It was important for Christians in Luke's day who were suffering.

His listeners seem to be mainly Gentile Christians.

They were suffering for their faith.

Jesus in the passage is speaking to the disciples.

There are ***four beatitudes*** and ***four woes***.

The ***first three beatitudes*** have a common grammatical link.

The ***first three woes*** have a common grammatical link.

That enables us to wonder about the ***fourth beatitude*** and the ***fourth woe***, and why Luke uses this format.

The word "you" refers to the disciples.

They were a struggling minority in the world of that day.

They were followers of Jesus.

To have a deeper understanding of this passage, we can ask the Christians in our parish from Syria and Iraq, about what this gospel passage means for them as disciples.

Then he looked up at his disciples and said:

***'Blessed are you who are poor,
for yours is the kingdom of God.***

***Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you will be filled.***

***'Blessed are you who weep now,
for you will laugh.***

***Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you,
revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.***

***Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;
for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.***

WOES

For life of the disciples is compared to those who do not follow the way of discipleship.

Those who haven't carried the cross, who haven't made the sacrifices.

Those who believe that they are in control and self-sufficient and believe they don't need God.

Those who believe that they can take what they want, at the expense of others.

Those who don't care about the poverty in the world.

Those who don't care about the health of the earth, our common home.

Yet their riches and lifestyle won't last into eternity.

*But woe to you who are rich,
for you have received your consolation.
Woe to you who are full now,
for you will be hungry.
'Woe to you who are laughing now,
for you will mourn and weep.
Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the
false prophets.'*

AN INVITATION

You are invited this week to read about the former Aral Sea and why it was abused.
Compare the photos, read about efforts to restore the North Aral Sea.
Ponder the lessons this story has for us in Australia.
Ponder where today's Gospel leads us in prayer and action.
We recall the *fourth [beatitude](#)* and the *fourth [woe](#)*.

FOURTH BEATITUDE

*'Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you,
revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.
Rejoice on that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven;
for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.'*

*'Woe to you when all speak well of you,
for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.'*

FOURTH WOE

May we speak up and care for our common home.
Not because we like the sound of our own voice in public.
Not because of adrenalin pumping through us.
But **speaking up and acting in solidarity
in a humble, just, caring, compassionate and courageous way.**
Protecting the earth our common home,
even if it means that we are excluded, reviled, defamed,
and people no longer speak well of us.

As we continue to be inspired by [Matthew's Sermon on the Mount](#),
let us also be inspired by [Luke's Sermon on the Plain](#).

PRAYER

*We ask you, O God,
for forgiveness for humanity's abuse of the Aral Sea,
and to help us learn from this terrible tragedy.*

*We ask you, O God,
to bless those who are trying to heal parts of the former Sea,
and to bless those around the world who seek to heal
parts of our common home that have been abused.*

*We ask you, O God,
to help us to work together in caring for the earth,
and to care for all the people who live on earth,
especially the poor and marginalized.*

*We ask you, O God,
to inspire us to be advocates,
and healers, and stewards
and carers of the earth, our common home.
Amen.*

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/021719.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook17022019>]

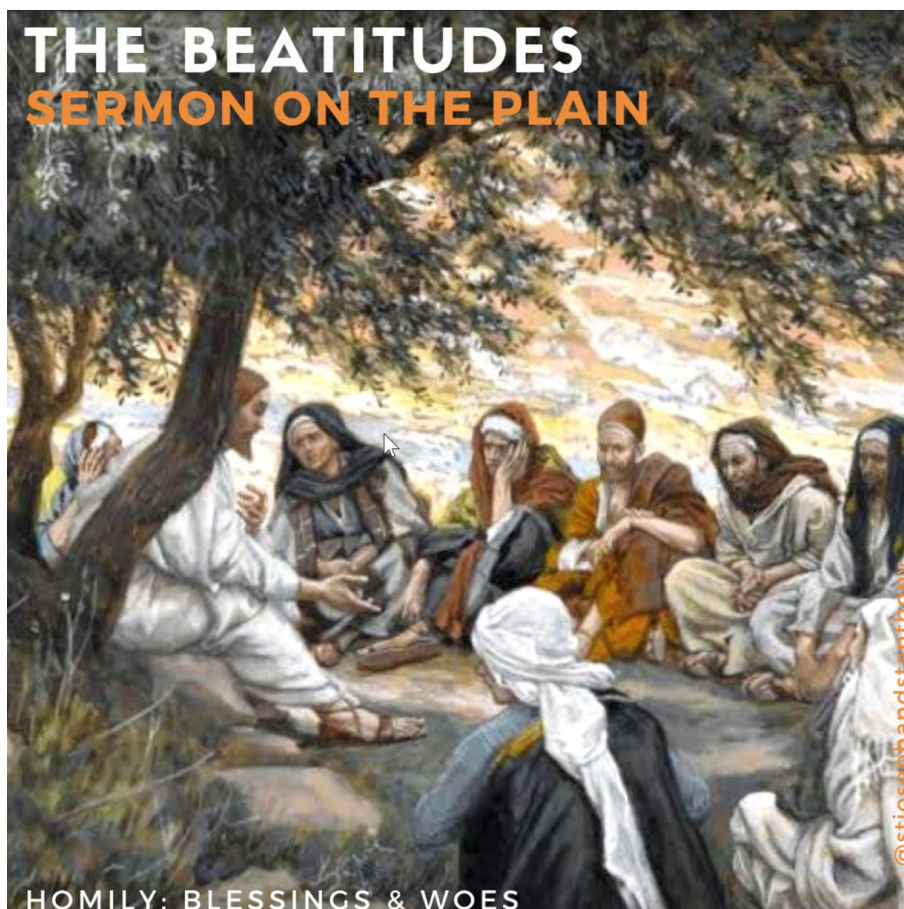
Links to further information:

[Aral Sea – Environmental Change Hotspot 1977 / 2013 UN Environment Programme](#)

[Aral Sea Archival Fonds – ‘Memory of the World’ UNESCO](#)

[Sustaining Livelihoods Affected by the Aral Sea Disaster UN Volunteers](#)

[UN launches new fund to advance sustainable development in Aral Sea region UN News](#)



The Exhortation to the Apostles, by James Tissot | public domain