

CREATION: BIODIVERSITY & SPIRITUALITY  
CARE FOR CREATION SUNDAY  
25<sup>th</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time Year C, 22<sup>th</sup> September 2019

#### TODAY IN THE HOMILY

- we reflect on the **three Bible Readings** of this Sunday, from the prophet **Amos**, from St Paul's First Letter to **Timothy** and from the **Gospel of Luke**.
- we pray **two prayers**, one for those in need of **life-giving rain**, and the other about **Biodiversity**.
- in this Season of Creation 2019, we focus on **biodiversity**, and **birdlife in particular**
- and we discover a **spirituality of water** in the remarkable [2004 Bishops Statement on the Murray-Darling Basin](#).

#### BOOK OF AMOS

The 1<sup>st</sup> Reading from the prophet **Amos 8:4-7** in the Old Testament challenges dishonesty in business, and rebukes those who trample the dignity and rights of the needy and the poor of the land.

*'Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, saying, 'When will the new moon be over so that we may sell grain; and the sabbath, so that we may offer wheat for sale? We will make the ephah small and the shekel great, and practise deceit with false balances, buying the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, and selling the sweepings of the wheat.'*

In this Season of Creation, in the light of the prophet Amos, we examine our relationships with the human family.

We are called to reject dishonesty in business deals,

We are called to affirm the dignity of all people.

We are called to commit to a sharing of our resources.

We are called to support the poor of the land.

#### LETTER TO TIMOTHY

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading from the **1<sup>st</sup> Letter of Paul to Timothy 2:1-8** implores us:

*'First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings should be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.'*

We are reminded to pray for everyone,

including our politicians and our public servants and institutional leaders.

We affirm the right of people to live peacefully in godliness and dignity.

With water such a critical issue for people in many parts of Australia, let us now pray for those in need of life-giving rain.

## PRAYER FOR OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS

**We pray to you, Jesus for our sisters and brothers**

- In areas severely damaged by recent fires in Queensland and NSW.
- In the Firefighting and Emergency Services who work so hard in the battle with raging bushfires.
- In the many drought-affected parts of Australia.
- In Blackall-Tambo Parish with drought and other daily challenges
- In the Great Artesian Basin region
- In the Murray-Darling Basin region
- In South Sudan with water well projects in the villages we support.

*We pray to you, Jesus for the gift of life-giving rain.*

*We pray to you, Jesus for our politicians, public servants, community and institutional leaders and ourselves, that we will work together as a family, to care for the blessings of biodiversity that you have given us on earth, our common home.*

Amen.

## GOSPEL OF LUKE 16

The Gospel today is **Luke 16:1-13.**

Jesus tells us a parable about a dishonest manager.

In verses 16:10-13 Jesus concludes with these words:

*'Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own? No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.'*

In our relationships with the human family around the world, and in our relationship with the earth, our common home, we offer our service to God.

We place before God, our commitment this season in affirming the biodiversity of God's creation.

## BIOVERSITY AND BIRD LIFE

In the media in the last few days, we have heard about the Report

*'Decline of the North American avifauna' in Science on 19<sup>th</sup> September.*

Authors include Kenneth V. Rosenberg, Adriaan M. Dokter, Peter J. Blancher, John R. Sauer, Adam C. Smith, Paul A. Smith, Jessica C. Stanton, Arvind Panjabi, Laura Helft, Michael Parr and Peter P. Marra.

In the report abstract it says,

*'Using multiple and independent monitoring networks,*

*we report population losses across much of the North American avifauna over 48 years, including once common species and from most biomes. Integration of range-wide population trajectories and size estimates indicates a net loss approaching 3 billion birds, or 29% of 1970 abundance.'*

Scientific American article '[Silent Skies: Billions of North American Birds Have Vanished](#)' provides further details.

The harm of **pesticides** on the bird population is one of the key factors. As we know in Australia, another contributing cause can be **loss of habitat**.

#### THE WEB OF LIFE: BIODIVERSITY AS GOD'S BLESSING | 2019 SEASON OF CREATION THEME

This [2019 Season of Creation](#) - September 1<sup>st</sup> – October 4<sup>th</sup> - has as its theme

*'The Web of Life: Biodiversity as God's blessing'.*

#### A PRAYER FOR BIODIVERSITY

Our Care for Creation group has produced [A Prayer for Biodiversity](#).

Rosie Bugden from the group wrote the prayer and did a water colour painting of an **Eastern Curlew, a large migratory wader**.

Many of the Eastern Curlew fly south over 13,000 km along the [East Asian-Australasian Flyway](#) from Siberia and other parts annually to Moreton Bay in Queensland.

It is estimated that Eastern Curlew lose 40% of their body weight on the journey.

The mangroves within the boundaries of some of our parishes in the south-east Queensland are their destination.

For example, **Tinchi Tamba** Wetlands in Bald Hills, **Boondall** Wetlands, several areas from the Sunshine Coast and **Bribie to Redcliffe Peninsular** and other areas of **Moreton Bay** to the northern Gold Coast.

Two well-known areas are the western sides of **Moreton Island** and **North Stradbroke Island**.

Near our Archdiocesan Santa Teresa Spirituality Centre at **Ormiston**, is an artificial roost to protect several species of waders, including the Eastern Curlew, within a short walk from the Centre property.

The protection of the habitats of migratory birds for their **ultra-marathons** is one of the very important needs in respecting biodiversity.

Their survival depends on **our protection of their habitats**.

The Eastern Curlew is a symbol of endangered species.

Pope Francis reminds us in the church social teaching '[Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home](#)' of the many dimensions of caring for the earth.

May we work and pray together to be responsible carers for the Earth, our common home.

The biodiversity prayer card was sent electronically to all parishes in the Archdiocese in the fortnightly newsletter.

Let us now pray together [A Prayer for Biodiversity](#), which is in our parish newsletter.

[We pray]

## A SPIRITUALITY OF WATER

### WHERE DO WE FIND A BIBLICAL REFLECTION ON CREATION, IN AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT?

Let us discover one of the reflections together.

On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004, the Feast Day of St Francis of Assisi, patron saint of ecology, the Catholic Bishops of the Murray Darling Basin in Australia signed and endorsed the statement [The Gift of Water](#).

As well as examining the challenges and initiatives and needs of the Basin, the Bishops spoke about '**a spirituality of water.**'

With urgent concerns about climate change around the world, let reflect once more on these 2004 Biblical insights into spirituality and creation.

*'We see the rivers and all the living creatures that depend upon them as part of God's good creation.'*

*In the opening chapters of Genesis, we find the Creator delighting in the diversity of creatures and declaring them to be good: the seas, the dry land, seed-bearing plants, fruit trees, sea creatures, birds, cattle, creeping things, and wild animals of every kind.*

*We are told that all the fruitfulness of creation springs from the divine blessing. All is God's gift.*

*Translating this to our own time and place, we think of the Creator who takes delight in the Darling, the Murrumbidgee and the Murray, in native frogs, platypuses, swans and egrets and declares them good.*

*What is the place of human beings in relation to the rest of creation?*

*According to the Bible, we too are God's creatures.*

*We are part of the interconnected community of creation, interrelated with all other creatures.*

*As images of God (Gen 1:27) we are called to work with creation, and to do so in such a way as to manifest the love and respect that God has for each creature. We are to be humble stewards before God. We are told "to cultivate and take care" of what God has given (Gen 2:15).*

*As we reflect about this in our own context,*

*we interpret this to mean that our special part of creation, the Murray-Darling Basin, is entrusted to us by God.*

*We are to receive its fruitfulness as God's gift.*

*We are called to be faithful trustees, respecting the integrity of God's creation.*

*This involves a call to protect the biodiversity of the Murray-Darling Basin.*

*According to the Bible, the diversity of creation*

*not only springs from the hand of God, but gives expression to God:*

*"O Lord, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures" (Psalm 104:24).*

*God's covenant with Noah embraces all of God's diverse creatures (Gen 9:12-16).*

*Some of the greatest theologians of the church have meditated on the diversity of creatures and have seen this as expressing the abundance of the trinitarian God. According to St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure the diversity of species represents the wonder and beauty of God that transcends any one creature. God's creatures express and represent the Trinity. They are not simply there for human use, but have their own dignity, value and integrity. Such a view challenges the destruction of species and their habitats in the modern era.*

*As we ponder this in relationship to the Murray-Darling Basin, we see the rivers and all their birds, fish and animals as creatures that emerge and are sustained by God's ongoing creation. The loving act of ongoing creation has enabled them to flourish in this place. They are part of a story of ongoing creation that takes place over millions of years. They are God's gift to us. They can communicate something of God to us. We are called to care for them, as fellow creatures before God and as loving and wise stewards of God's creation.*

*As we reflect on the Murray-Darling river system, we remember that Jesus was baptised in the Jordan River and that much of his life and ministry took place around the inland Sea of Galilee. He preached the good news of God to those who lived from fishing the Sea of Galilee and working the land around it. Pilgrims who spend time in Galilee today often reflect that Jesus would have met the God that he called Abba Father as he prayed and worked in its hills and valleys. The creatures of Galilee, its wild flowers, birds, foxes, trees, fish, crops, sheep, goats and its human communities were the basis for Jesus' parables of the Kingdom of God. In a special way Galilee was his place, the place where he encountered God and lived a life of love and fidelity before God.*

*In a similar way, the Murray-Darling Basin is the place of God for us. It is our Galilee, our special place under the Southern Cross. It is a place where we encounter God in quiet moments and are called to live our own vocations before God. As Jesus was nourished by the wild flowers and the birds of Galilee, our spirits are nourished by great River red gums, by Murray cod and Short-necked turtles, by Yellow rosellas, Superb parrots and by pelicans soaring high above us.*

*Jesus belonged to a people who knew about deserts and drought, and who loved moving, living water. They saw running water as a blessing from God and as a symbol of life. It was not taken for granted. They saw it as a precious gift.*

*For them, a spring of living water was a beautiful image for the life that God gives us (Isaiah 12:3; 55:1; Jeremiah 2:13; Psalm 46:4; Ezekiel 47:1-20; Zechariah 14:8; Revelations 22:1-2). They thought of God's presence and revelation, which they often described as the Wisdom of God, as like a life-giving fountain of living water (Prov 13:14; Sir 15:3; 24:23-29).*

*In John's Gospel, Jesus, hot and tired after his journey, sits by a well.*

*He asks a Samaritan woman for a drink.*

*Then he engages with her in a long conversation about the things of God.*

*Later we hear that his disciples find this conversation astonishing (4:27).*

*At the heart of this encounter, Jesus offers the woman living water:*

***Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.***

***The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life. (4:13-14)***

*Later, at the feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, Jesus cries out:*

***'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'* (7:38)**

*The author of the gospel explains that this living water is the Spirit of God, the Spirit that will be poured out through Jesus' life-giving death and resurrection (7:39). For John's Gospel, and for all later Christians, living water is a sign of the Holy Spirit, a sign of our baptismal life in Christ, a sign of the life of God in us.*

*Perhaps it would be good to imagine ourselves sitting quietly with the risen Jesus by the Darling, the Murrumbidgee or the Murray, as the woman of Samaria sat talking with him at the well.*

*What would Jesus feel for the human beings who live around the river?*

*What would he have to say to us about the health of the river, about its fish, birds and animals?*

*Where would he stand on practices that degrade the river?*

*We believe that the risen Christ would call us to see the river as a precious gift of God.*

*He would teach us that it is a place where we can encounter God.*

*He would explain how the rivers and all their creatures are, each in its own way, God's self-expression.*

*He would tell us that the waters of the river are a sign of the life of the Spirit in us.*

*He would point out that we hold the Murray-Darling in trust for future generations.*

*He would teach us to love and respect the rivers.*

*We Christians should be the first to treasure the gift of living water. We have before us St Francis of Assisi who saw all of God's creatures as interconnected in a family of creation.*

*For St Francis, other creatures are in kinship with human beings, brothers and sisters to us.*

*In his Canticle, he speaks of water as "Sister Water,"*

*and celebrates it as beautiful, clear and pure and essential to our existence. Science also tells us that our lives and those of all other creatures on our planet are totally dependent upon clear and pure water. We need a renewed spirituality of water that recognises its centrality for all life. We need to treasure it as the life-giving gift of God and as a beautiful sign of the life of God in us.'*

You are invited to read this reflection a few times during this coming week.  
May we take the time to appreciate its meaning.

**WHERE IT MENTIONS THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN,  
WHAT WORDS WOULD YOU SUBSTITUTE FOR THE REGION WHERE YOU LIVE?**

At one of the Statement's launches in 2004, people commented on the realisation that the earth is truly a living organism.

It is a living gift, always in motion, always becoming.

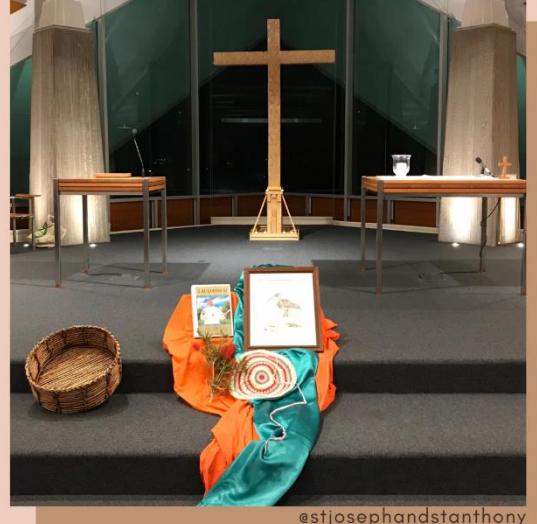
As the earth moves around the Sun, and as our continent is on a plate  
migrating north-north east at 6 - 7cm per year,  
may we move together in appreciating biodiversity in life  
as an unfolding gift and blessing of God.

I now invite members of our Care for Creation group to come forward and share their insights and practical suggestions for us.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/092219.cfm>]

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