

‘THE GOSPEL & PROTECTING THE GIFT OF WATER’

4th Sunday Ordinary Time Year C – 3rd February 2019

THREE ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

Let us begin by reading about three environmental concerns.
The sentences from the quotes have been spaced for easier reading.
This will be a longer homily. We are invited to take our time with it.
Then we will focus on the Gospel.

IRRAWADDY IN MYANMAR

You are invited to read an excerpt below from the Press Release
[“STOP TRAFFICKING OUR MOTHER IRRAWADDY”](#) by Cardinal Charles Maung Bo in
Myanmar.

*‘We the people of Myanmar, with tears in our eyes,
our hearts shaken by fear and sorrow,
knock at the doors of our rulers and the international community.
Faced with the sad prospect of losing our mother Irrawaddy,
through Myitstone dam, to the greed of a superpower,
every Myanmar citizen pleads with all people of good will
to come to the support of the poor of Myanmar.*

*Irrawaddy is not a river to us, she is not a commodity to be bartered.
She is the sacred mother of every Myanmar people.
Her history is intertwined with the history of Myanmar.
Like the jewel around the neck of our nation, Irrawaddy traverses
through the whole nation crossing thousands of miles.
She is witness to our sorrows, joys and wounded history.
She is our hope, she is our destiny.*

*For a nation of agriculture, where 80 per cent of the people lives by farming,
Irrawaddy is an unfailing accompanier in their livelihood.
Her Majesty, her dancing down the mountains,
her mystic meandering through the soul of the nation,
her generosity to the poor farmers, make Irrawaddy the nations' sacred identity.
For thousands of sacred sites along the banks of Irrawaddy,
this river is the most sacred symbol of our nation.
This sacred mother is now open for trade.*

*Big and powerful countries need everything from this nation.
For decades, they abused its strategic position for threatening Myanmar.
They commodified our girls and women through human trafficking
in the northern states of Myanmar.
The same sad fate now falls on our Mother Irrawaddy.
The recent events in the country have further, unfortunately,
increased the leverage of certain countries over our nation.
Threats and blackmail are used with impunity*

*This is the moment of heart-wrenching tragedy.
Myitstone dam is the death sentence to the people of Myanmar.
The grim prospect of millions of farmers losing their livelihood,
the abuse of sacred sites along the rivers, the death and destruction
of the precious flora and fauna of our dear nation, is becoming a nightmarish reality.
This dam is an environmental disaster.
Myitstone dam is a toxic cognac for chronic war.
Peace will fade in the horizon.
A bleak future awaits the people of Myanmar. We do not deserve this.'*

Cardinal Bo has taken a strong prophetic stand.

*'Myitstone dam is a toxic cognac for chronic war. Peace will fade in the horizon.
A bleak future awaits the people of Myanmar. We do not deserve this.'*

FOUR AUSTRALIAN DOCUMENTS ON WATER BASINS IN AUSTRALIA

Let us now turn to four Australian documents on water basins in our own country:

1. [Royal Commission report on the Murray-Darling Basin, delivered 29 January 2019](#)
2. [Catholic Bishops and Earthcare 2004 Statement – The Gift of Water](#)
3. an excerpt from the Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee Fact Sheet - ['Great Artesian Basin Economic Report: Economic output of groundwater dependent sectors in the Great Artesian Basin.](#)
4. [Statement by the Catholic and Anglican Bishops of Townsville, dated October 2017](#)

MURRAY-DARLING BASIN

In 2004 [THE GIFT OF WATER – A STATEMENT ENDORSED BY BISHOPS OF THE MURRAY-DARLING BASIN](#) was prepared by [Catholic Earthcare Australia](#).

The Bishops stressed the need of *restoring river flow*:

'We strongly support government and community decisions to restore flow to the Murray. This will demand not only water efficient practices and engineering solutions but also realistic limits on how much can be taken from the rivers. It will involve related initiatives such as salinity control in both dryland and irrigation areas, best management land use, and curtailing agriculture, industry and urban development that uses unsustainable quantities of water.

We support reducing salt and nutrient loads to the rivers, managing weir pools, limiting chemicals, enabling fish passages and removing exotic species. Taking responsibility for our rivers will mean investing a significantly greater percentage of government funds in improved management of the Basin.

We believe that restoring environmental flow is essential for the health of the rivers, for the sake of human communities now and into the future, and for the survival of the diverse species of God's creatures that inhabit the Murray-Darling Basin.'

From the recent 2019 [Royal Commission report on the Murray-Darling Basin](#), page 79 we learn:

'The Murray-Darling Basin (Basin) is environmentally, economically and socially important to not only Basin communities, but to the nation as a whole.

The Basin is the largest catchment area in Australia, consisting of 23 river valleys and over 77 000 kilometres of watercourses, spanning an area of over a million square kilometres and across four States and the Australian Capital Territory.

It is a highly variable system, with average annual inflows of 32 800 GL per year, but which have ranged from 117 907 GL in 1956 to less than 6740 GL in 2006.

Within the Basin, there are over 30 000 wetlands, 16 of which are listed as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Basin is home to over 46 species of native fish and 120 species of waterbirds. Over two million people live in the Basin, and more than three million people in total depend upon it for water.

There are over 40 Aboriginal nations within the Basin, who comprise 15% of Australia's population of Aboriginal people.

Forty percent of all farms in Australia are located within the Basin, and they contribute approximately \$22 billion to the national economy.

Nearly all of Australia's rice and cotton and 80% of Australia's grapes are grown in the Basin.

Tourism contributes a further \$8 billion.

Agricultural industries in the Basin employ 45% of agricultural workers in Australia.'

GREAT ARTESIAN BASIN (GAB)

The Joint Statement from the Catholic Bishop of Townsville and Anglican Bishop of North Queensland [In the Care of Our Common Home: "Sister Earth"](#)

The Bishops spoke on several environmental issues.

After addressing the need to protect the Great Barrier Reef (with its coral bleaching, continuing toxic run-off from land, and other points) they said,

'• Another "Pearl of Great Price" that is in danger is our incredible Artesian Basin and its age-old water resources.

The projected mega- mining developments across Queensland, especially the Galilee Basin, look to usurp this "coal resource for allages."

Other issues of concern are the significant increase in lung disease with local coal mine employees and the one-third increase in land-clearing across the state.

• There is a need for urgent dialogue in the critique of the “modern myths” of “individualism, self-centredness, self-absorption, progress that is unlimited, the unregulated market, competition and consumerism as a remedy for all ills.” We applaud those in our communities who have responded already to the many serious issues that our Common Home faces; those who undertake their stewardship seriously day by day. You are making a difference!’

In the **Great Artesian Basin Coordinating Committee** Fact Sheet - ‘Great Artesian Basin Economic Report, we read

‘It underlies approximately 22% of Australia – an area of more than 1.7 million square kilometres, beneath arid and semi-arid parts of Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The GAB is Australia’s largest and most important groundwater resource. Water extracted from the GAB is the only reliable water source for communities, industries and landholders in the arid and semi-arid parts underlain by the Basin. Water from the GAB has shaped much of the natural and cultural history of central Australia.

Without GAB water, economic development and social infrastructure in many GAB regions would not have been able to occur and could not continue into the future. In contrast to other major water resources in this country there is very little accurate timely information about the quantities of water extracted from the GAB, what the water is used for, and the economic, social and environmental values that accrue from using the water.’

We as a community are challenged to know more about the GAB.
How can we make informed decisions with *‘very little accurate timely information’*?

The descriptions above on the **Irrawaddy** in Myanmar, the **Murray Darling Basin** and the **Great Artesian Basin in Australia** highlight the importance of these particular gifts of water in the lives of local people.

Water that needs to be appreciated, studied and protected.

Water that is essential now and in the future.

Water is essential to life.

THE GOSPEL & 'LAUDATO SI' – ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME' HOW DO WE SPEAK IN A PROPHETIC WAY, TRUE TO THE GOSPEL?

Today's Gospel doesn't speak specifically about water.
It does help us to understand challenges involved
in speaking prophetically about social justice and community issues as a Christian.

Last week we focused on the **mission of Jesus**

as he explained the quote from Isaiah.

We looked at some of the moments in the ongoing conversion
of St Oscar Romero from El Salvador.

It is one thing to make a statement and declare our mission.

It is another thing to face the challenges when we make a prophetic stand.

As Catholics, we learn from the creation church teaching of Pope Francis in 2015,
titled ['Laudato Si' – On Care for Our Common Home'](#)

We need to study the document.

We have a prophetic call in caring for the earth our common home.

BUT WHAT CAN TODAY'S GOSPEL PASSAGE TEACH US IN BEING PROPHETIC?

The passage follows on from last week about the mission of Jesus.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE 4:21-30

The passage begins with Jesus speaking graciously.

The people can accept that.

We can all talk graciously about the environment.

'The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to say to them,

'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

All spoke well of him and were amazed

at the gracious words that came from his mouth.

However, when Jesus begins to reveal more of his prophetic mission
the response changes.

He grew up here in **Nazareth**.

He knows them. He knows his home town.

And he knows this town is different from others part of Galilee,
where he performed miracles and preached.

In Capernaum he would later work miracles. There was faith there.

Here in **Nazareth**, he is seen as Joseph's son.

They don't accept who he truly is.

They would like a few healing miracles,
but their sight is tunnel vision.

As we consider the environment,

we too can be tempted to reduce our eyesight to tunnel vision,

protecting our lifestyle and ignoring our responsibility.

'They said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'

He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Doctor, cure yourself!" And you will say, "Do here also in your home town the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum." ' '

Jesus tells them plainly.

"And he said, 'Truly I tell you,

no prophet is accepted in the prophet's home town.

But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up for three years and six months,

and there was a severe famine over all the land; yet Elijah

was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.

There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.' "

They have been challenged.

Jesus refers

to the widow at Zarephath in Sidon – 1 Kings 17:8-24

and Elisha curing the Syrian Naaman - 2 Kings 5:8-14.

Do they ask what they can do to become more open? No.

Do they enter into a dialogue about it? No.

Will they be able to control Jesus? No.

What is their response?

They turn violent. His own townspeople turn against him.

Rage.

In being prophetic and challenging the security and self-interest of others, we might face the **rage** of others.

We might face violence.

Yet Jesus issued challenges in a spirit of love.

When we speak prophetically about the earth, we are called to this,

not with rage, but with courage and love.

'When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.

They got up, drove him out of the town,

and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.

But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.'

This rejection of Jesus reminds us of the prophecy of Simeon earlier in Luke 2:34-35.

Simeon prophesied that Jesus would be a sign

'that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed'

and Mary told that *'a sword will pierce your own soul too.'*

We learn about the inner thoughts of people when they do not seriously protect the gift of water on our planet Earth.

The acceptance and rejection of Jesus happens again later in the Gospel, when the people of Jerusalem initially welcome Jesus, and then later reject him and Jesus is persecuted and crucified.

After Nazareth, Jesus continued his mission elsewhere in other parts of Galilee. He went down to Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee, where people are amazed by his healings and authority.

Yet his mission was for all humanity and God's creation, including Nazareth.

Sometimes we need to move around the brick wall of resistance and find another way forward.

We do this by a discerning spirit of analysis and prayer.

In caring for the vital gift of water in Myanmar and Australia, we need to study and encourage others to study.

We need to know the facts. We need to be in solidarity.

We remember that before Jesus stated his mission in Nazareth, he had faced the temptations in the wilderness.

Then he began his teaching.

We too need to know ourselves and name the temptations that we face, and how we pray about them, and how we respond.

As Christians, as we show our concern for God's gifts of creation, we see our concern and study and discussion and action in the context of our wider mission of following Jesus.

AN INVITATION

Each of our parish ministry groups are invited to nominate two representatives to attend a special evening hosted by our parish [Care for Creation group](#).

The invitation says,

"The parish's Care for Creation group is presenting a video called 'Global Healing' to help guide and inspire us in following Pope Francis' appeal in 'Laudato Si' On Care for Our Common Home'.

The video, especially designed for parishes, will be shown at 7.30pm On Thursday, February 28, in the parish centre."

PRAYER

Let us pray in solidarity with people caring for the Earth - our common home.

We pray this week for our sisters and brothers in

The **Irrawaddy River Basin in Myanmar**,

The **Murray-Darling River Basin in Australia**

and the **Great Artesian Basin in Australia**.

We pray for the safety of our sisters and brothers in **coastal North Queensland**

who are experiencing torrential rain, rising water levels, dam overflow, flooding and emergency evacuation.

We pray for those evacuated
and for the fire fighters and emergency services personnel.

We pray for the torrential rain over these flooded areas to stop.

We pray for the safety of our sisters and brothers in **north west Queensland**
who are experiencing much needed, life giving rain
with its road closures and isolation.

We pray for the safety of our sisters and brothers in **Tasmania**
who are battling around forty bushfires.

We pray for those evacuated
and for the fire fighters and emergency services personnel.

We pray for cooler conditions and for rain for them.

Amen.

Fr. Gerry

[Readings: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/020319.cfm>]

[Parish Facebook: <http://bit.ly/parishFacebook03022019>]

- [Stop Trafficking our Mother Irrawaddy](#) Cardinal Bo, Myanmar
- [Royal Commission report on the Murray-Darling Basin](#)
- [Catholic Bishops and Earthcare 2004 Statement – The Gift of Water](#)
- [Great Artesian Basin Economic Report: Economic output of groundwater dependent sectors in the Great Artesian Basin.](#)
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