



Solemn Vespers for the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation

Homily of His Excellency, Most Reverend Robert Casey
September 1, 2023

How grateful I am to join with Fr. Sotirios Malamis of the Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago and all of you who join us from the Catholic and Greek Orthodox communities of greater Chicagoland.

How grateful I am to have Sarah Elizabeth Ippel with us. She will speak to us later this evening on “A Chicago Model for Cultivating a Sustainable and Just Future.”

And, how grateful I am for the leadership of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis as they challenge us to greater care for the gift of creation.

All of us gathered... those present here at Our Lady of Perpetual Help and those who join us through the livestream... come together as witnesses of a shared call.

God has called us to greater harmony and greater unity. And, in a particular way, God brings us together today to celebrate the gift of creation and to recognize the importance of our becoming one in the care for creation.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and Pope Francis have spoken and written extensively that the care for creation does not belong to some. Care for creation is a responsibility belonging to all of us. It is a responsibility that must be carried out in this present moment and then handed on to the next generation.

However, as we take upon ourselves the responsibility of caring for creation, we cannot ignore the challenge before us. We live in a time of great division and polarization. Through many generations we have honed our skills to separate and partition ourselves off from one another.

We have taken to heart the belief that if *you* are different from *me*, we therefore cannot associate with one another. Even though we have been given life by the same God and placed upon this planet as the co-heirs of creation, all too easily we surrender ourselves to the ways of selfishness and self-centeredness.

In his 2020 book called *Love Is the Way: Holding on to Hope in Troubling Times*, Most Rev. Michael Curry, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, wrote, “Selfishness is the most destructive force in all the cosmos... Selfishness destroys families. Selfishness destroys communities. Selfishness has destroyed societies, nations, and global communities, and it will destroy the human race by laying waste to our planet. If we let it.”

From the first fruits of selfishness and self-centeredness, told in the story of Adam and Eve, to the present day, we recognize the destruction that comes when we choose the path of division, isolation, and exclusion. In this present moment, our society, and our Churches more specifically, find

themselves challenged to follow a different way... to seek out a path of unity, dialogue, and inclusion that can bring healing and hope to a weary world.

In this year of 2023, we find ourselves quite far from the Garden of Eden. Since the dawn of creation, our world has seen the rise and fall of various civilizations. We have witnessed great development, new industries, and innovative technologies.

Some of this progress can be seen as a benefit, a gift from a God who continues to inspire the minds of men and women with new discoveries of the wonder of creation.

However, some of our advances have not moved us forward in the right direction and have instead set us back.

As cities and towns have risen around us, we have ended up covering the earth in concrete, deforesting and developing once pristine wilderness that may never be seen again.

We have drained our lakes and oceans and diverted rivers and streams, giving witness to how our thoughtlessness can disrupt the natural flow of life. We have drunk up the world around us without thought for the thirst of tomorrow, forgetting how the actions of one person today can impact the future of so many.

The theme of this year's ecumenical Season of Creation is "Let Justice and Peace Flow."

This theme is inspired by the words of the prophet Amos: "Let justice flow on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." (Amos 5:24)

Reflecting on this theme in his September message, Pope Francis places all of humanity in a common stream with a hope that "all flow together into the vast ocean of God's loving mercy." Humanity can become a healing river, or as Pope Francis states, "a source of life for its surroundings... a source of life for our common home and all its inhabitants."

The pope goes on to say, "In the same way that a river gives life to all kinds of animal and plant life, [we] must give life by sowing justice and peace in every place it reaches."

Considering this image of the flowing river and never-failing stream, my thoughts take me back to 1989, when singer and songwriter Carly Simon found herself on the Top 10 music charts with her hit song, *Let the Rivers Run*.

In this song, she sings of a city. And the city she sings of is not simply alive for a day... it is a city alive with hope for its future. "Let the river run," she sings. "Let all the dreamers wake the nation. Come, the New Jerusalem!"

Amid all that we have built up and developed, and aware of the impact of our actions upon Creation and our human family, Carly Simon's song resounds with an urge for us to get up and get moving. We cannot sit still. The call for justice and peace summons us out of our sleep. Climate change awakens us to action. Let the river run. We cannot be stagnant.

Ms. Simon sings out, "We're coming to the edge... Running on the water... Coming through the fog... Your sons and daughters. Let the river run... Let all the dreamers wake the nation. Come, the New Jerusalem!"

We find ourselves at a moment of awakening. We are being asked to greet the day before us with renewed vision, with improved listening, and with greater feeling.

Can we look upon creation with honesty and humility, allowing ourselves to see the consequences of our actions and the effect they have upon the earth and her inhabitants?

Can we listen more closely to the earth's heartbeat as our world seeks to beat more in harmony with her people?

Can we feel more profoundly the impact we have upon our sacred home and tread more lightly upon our lands that have become so beaten and bruised?

Pope Francis encourages us in the encyclical *Laudato Si*. "All is not lost," the pope says, "Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning" (LS 205).

We have been called to a greater care for creation. This isn't simply a call from singer and songwriter Carly Simon. This is a call that comes from our Creator. As sons and daughters of the living God, we must be bold in our response. "Wake the nation... Come the New Jerusalem."