



Installation of the Chicagoland Christians United for the Care of Creation Declaration

Homily Given By Bishop Robert G. Casey

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Holy Name Cathedral

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On August 17th of last year, we gathered for the signing of the Declaration for the Care of Creation at the Parliament of the World's Religions at McCormick Place. For those who were able to join us, you might recall the rain that fell through the night and into the morning of the signing.

We gathered on the outdoor terrace of McCormick Place with overcast skies, the remnants of rain clouds above our heads and the still wet concrete below our feet. But, as Fr. Andreas sung out the glorious first note of "Ode to Birds," the clouds parted, the sun burst through the grey morning, and we were illuminated in Divine Light. It was as if God was offering a great "Amen" to our prayer and reassuring us that our pledge to the care of creation was not being done without a promise of heavenly assistance.

The grace that shone upon us was encouraging and hope-filled. The sunlight that had arrived so providentially that morning brought with it a strong reminder: in order to put into practice the declaration that we were signing, we would need some amazing grace to inspire us to move from declaration to deeds. We would require the Light of Christ to show us the way and the strength of the Spirit to compel from simply words to simple, but impactful, actions.

This is the exhortation we hear proclaimed in the Letter of James, challenging us to be "doers of the word and not hearers only."

The Declaration for the Care of Creation is a lovely document. It will be a nice adornment on a wall here at Holy Name Cathedral. But if we are simply the signers, or the readers, or the hearers of these words without becoming the "doers," how can we expect creation to be cared for? Our words must become deeds. Our faith must inspire good works.

This was brought home to me following the signing ceremony at McCormick Place. Dan Olsen and Susan Pudelek from the archdiocese's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs invited me to join them at Langar, a communal meal organized by the Sikh community during the Parliament of the World's Religions.

Langar is a wonderful tradition of generosity and service, providing a meal to all free of charge, regardless of religion, caste, gender, economic status or ethnicity. People sit together on the floor and eat together, as the Sikh community volunteers walk among the crowd dishing out some delicious vegetarian food. Many of us preach the importance of communion and the call to selfless service; Langar puts that into practice.

As I found my place on the floor, plate in hand and anxious to sample some yummy food, the man next to me said, "hello." He introduced himself to me as Joe, a Buddhist from Washington State.

Looking at me in my clerical suit, he asked what had brought me to the Parliament. I told him that I just participated in a ceremony where thirteen of us pledged to care for creation. "So, you signed a piece of paper," Joe said, "Now what?" His words were not said with any judgement or criticism. He spoke as a messenger from heaven, a modern-day Gabriel, sent from God with a clear message. Declarations are nice. The good works that are inspired because of them are even better.

And as I have pondered Joe's words and considered how it would be that I could move from faith to good works, I have continually found myself brought back to that prayer service in August with the sun shining brightly upon us. It will not be simply through my efforts, or through the intention or effort of anyone here, that this declaration will become more than a lovely piece of parchment. We become "doers" through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Our faith becomes works through the gifts and talents that God bestows on each of us.

How fitting that we are gathered here at Holy Name Cathedral on this evening, when the Church enters into its celebration of Pentecost. We recall at Pentecost that graced moment when disciples who had been full of fears and uncertainties embraced their faith anew. With the grace and the gifts of the Spirit given to them by the Risen Christ, they took that faith and put it into action. They moved from the Upper Room and out into the streets of Jerusalem. And the Spirit didn't stop there. Those spirit-filled men and women went out to all the world, to every corner of creation, not only proclaiming the Good News, but practicing what they preached, so that all creation might come to know the blessing of its Creator.

This week I came across my Baptismal certificate. On the 8th day of October, 1967, I was baptized at St. Adrian Church in Chicago. This document tells of a declaration made by my parents, godparents and me. I was being set on the path of discipleship. I was pledging to live my life according to the great commandment of love: love God and love of neighbor. But this certificate means nothing if in the past 56 years I have not put into practice what was proclaimed on the day of my Baptism.

And the Declaration of the Care for Creation means nothing if we do not put into practice what we proclaimed on August 17th, 2023. So, let us call upon the Holy Spirit this day to help us fan into flame the grace that has been placed into our hearts, a grace that can motivate us to action.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love.

Come Indwelling Grace, take root in our hearts, grow daily within us, and blossoming forth in us that we may renew the face of the earth.

Come Ruah, Spirit of Wind, blow through creation to refresh and restore what has become stagnant and stale.

Come Holy Fire, purge us of our sinful ways and old habits and ignite within us hearts ablaze with the desire to bring justice, peace and reconciliation to a weary and wounded creation.

With God to help us, may we demonstrate our faith not only in declarations but also in our works.

United in one Spirit, may we be compelled each day to become more than a people of parchment. May we become a people of action, putting into practice our praise of the God of all creation, and taking to heart the exhortation of James the Disciple and the challenge of Joe the Buddhist, "So you signed a piece of paper... Now what?"