



Blessed Be

April 2018

That of God in me greets that of God in you! Welcome to this edition of *Blessed Be*.

*Sheila Hawthorn has given us this piece by **Pope Francis** giving us some ideas on fasting to consider, and not just for Lent:*

Withdrawal from violence

Fast from hurting words and say kind words.
Fast from anger and be filled with patience.
Fast from pessimism and be filled with hope.
Fast from worries and have trust in God.
Fast from complaints and contemplate simplicity.
Fast from pressures and be prayerful.
Fast from bitterness and fill your hearts with joy.
Fast from selfishness and be compassionate towards others.
Fast from grudges and be reconciled.
Fast from words and be silent so you can listen.

I (Helen Macauley) was being haunted by the final line in this poem and so decided to look it up. I thought others might also enjoy renewing their acquaintance with it:

Milton: On his blindness

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies: "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts: who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly; thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

Now we have a reflection on Lamentation from Tricia Gemmell:

A Time to Weep

Lent is, by definition, a time to weep. On Ash Wednesday the prophet Joel proclaims, “Let your hearts be broken, not your garments torn.” For Catholics, this has always been a season of personal penance, a time to repent of our sins and resolve to do better. In the words of the perennial Lenten psalm (Psalm 51):

Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness.
In your compassion blot out my offence.
O wash me more and more from my guilt
And cleanse me from my sin.

My offences truly I know them;
My sin is always before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned;
What is evil in your sight I have done.

We now live in an age where there can be no doubt that every one of our personal actions affects the whole world. We are complicit, whether we like it or not, in the ecological devastation that is threatening to destroy everything we know and love, that is already causing suffering for the poorest in our world. We are caught up in a complex web from which it is impossible to disengage. It is well past time for us to confront our communal sin. It is time for us to weep.

The Book of Lamentations is a book of weeping. Rachel weeps for her children. Jesus, who once said, “Blessed are they who mourn,” weeps over Jerusalem. There is a time to weep, but we live in a culture that does not encourage mourning. As Susan Murphy, an Australian teacher of Zen and ecological activist, writes, “In the never-ending avalanche of factoids, opinions, gossip, trivia, brands, and sound bites, there is no space or sufficient quiet for *sorrow*, reflection, and resolve.” (My italics)

What a strange, original notion, I thought: making space for sorrow. And yet, that is precisely what Lent invites us to do. Why not turn our focus onto the suffering of the earth and its poor, for which we must bear some responsibility? Why not weep for what we see?

Joanna Macey, eco-philosopher and lifelong spiritual activist, puts it this way: “Planetary anguish lifts us onto another systemic level where we open to collective experience. It enables us to recognize our profound interconnectedness with all beings. Don’t apologize if you cry for the burning of the Amazon or the Appalachian mountains stripped open for coal. The sorrow, grief, and rage you feel are a measure of your humanity and your evolutionary maturity. As your heart breaks open there will be room for the world to heal. That is what is happening as we see people honestly confronting the sorrows of our time.”

In this time of weeping, let us weep tears of mourning, let our hearts be broken. Only then can there be healing and hope.

From The Wisdom of Gandhi:

I believe that if one man gains spiritually, the whole world gains with him, and if one man falls the whole world falls to that extent.

Tricia Gemmell has forwarded to us a book review by **Marian Ronan**:

Creation and the Cross: The Mercy of God for a Planet in Peril

By **Elizabeth A. Johnson**. Published by **Orbis Books**

My friends, we've got a problem.

Despite 2017 being the third hottest year on record, large swaths of California going up in flames, and massive storms flooding Houston, South Florida and Puerto Rico, a majority of US Christians still aren't much concerned about climate change. Like most problems, the causes of this one are complex. But as historian Lynn White argued already in 1967, a major reason for this deadly apathy is the dualism between spirit and matter that permeates much Christian thinking.

More than half a century after Lynn White's provocative indictment of dualism, ecofeminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson, in her splendid new book, *Creation and the Cross*, offers a remedy. White focused on the "dominion theory," the Christian belief that God had given humans "dominion" over all earth's creatures. Johnson homes in on another source of the human/nature binary, this one devised by the eleventh-century theologian, Anselm of Canterbury--the "satisfaction theory" of redemption. According to this theory, Jesus died on the cross to atone—to pay the debt owed to God—for human sin. And since the rest of creation—animals, plants, all biotic entities—cannot sin, redemption, salvation, the essence of the Christian faith, applies to humans, and humans alone.

But, Johnson argues compellingly, redemption is about a great deal more than human sin; it's about the compassionate mercy of God for all of creation, groaning and longing together for liberation from suffering. In her usual clear and frequently lyric style, Johnson draws on the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament to demonstrate that such a redemption of all creation has been part of the Christian tradition from the outset. She calls this understanding of redemption "accompaniment theology."

My favorite chapter in Johnson's delineation of this accompaniment theology of redemption is the next-to-the-last one, "God of All Flesh: Deep Incarnation." The creator God Jesus Christ is, Johnson explains, the God of all flesh, with flesh not signifying sin alone, as the dualism between spirit and matter suggests, but the finitude and death suffered by all creation, including God's own son. But with the resurrection, this "flesh was called to life again in transformed glory." And, as St. Paul writes, the hope promised to all in this transformation "has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven."

One of the interesting characteristics of *Creation and the Cross* is Johnson's use in it of a question and answer format, adopted, ironically enough, from the very book in which Anselm of Canterbury presents his satisfaction theory. Anselm says that he uses this format to make his thought accessible, and that is surely what Johnson is doing as well.

The argument that creation is at the heart of the faith is by no means a new one for Johnson; it plays a central role in a number of her earlier works, most recently, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (2014). And her claim that God suffers with all creation was precisely what caused the US Conference of Catholic Bishops to condemn her 2011 book, *Quest for the Living God*. That condemnation was based in the same dualist notion that suffering is exclusively the result of sin as Anselm's satisfaction theory, a notion *Laudato Si'* has surely laid to rest

But moving the symbol of the cross into the center of her theology makes that theology available to a much wider range of readers than her previous books did. May the compassionate Redeemer of all creation convert us, Catholics and Protestants alike, from apathy to a passionate concern about climate change and the other environmental crises that confront us.

Marian Ronan is Research Professor of Catholic Studies at New York Theological Seminary, NY, NY, and co-author of Women of Vision: Sixteen Founders of the International Grail Movement (Apocryphile Press, 2107). She was president of the Women's Ordination Conference board from 2000 to 2002.

*Andrea Venier has given us an excerpt from **Hildegard of Bingen**:*

For this is the wisdom-woman of God.
She watches over all people and all things.
She is of such radiance and brightness,
that you cannot gaze on her face or on the garments she wears.
For she is awesome in terror and gentle in goodness.
She has the radiance of divinity in her face.
She is with all and in all and of beauty so great
That no one can know how sweetly she bears with people,
And with what unfathomable mercy she treats them.

***Hidegarde of Bingen**, "Seeking God", Mary T. Malone, *Praying with the Women Mystics*, p.65)*

*Now we have an expansion on Jesus's final prayer by **Charles de Foucard** from his book, **Meditations of a Hermit**:*

Luke 23:46 – Father into thy hands I commend my spirit

This is the last prayer of Our Master, Our Beloved. May it be ours. And not only ours at our last moments, but at all times.

My Father I commend myself to you, I give myself to you, I leave myself in your hands. My Father, do with me as you wish. Whatever you do with me, I thank you, I accept everything. I am ready for anything. I thank you always. So long as your will is done in me and in all creatures, I have no other wish, my God. I put my soul into your hands, giving it to you, my God, with all my heart's love, which makes me crave to abandon myself to you without reserve, with utter confidence. For are you not my Father?

Thank you to everyone who has helped to make Blessed Be what it is. Remember, if you have anything you wish to contribute, whether it's something you've come across or written yourself, or a suggestion for something you'd like to see included, you're more than welcome to contact me at helenlmacauley@gmail.com

*And we close with a poem from **Teresa of Avila**:*

The Efficacy of Patience

Let nothing disturb you,
let nothing trouble you.
All things are passing;
God does not change.
Patience obtains all things;
who has God wants for nothing.
God alone suffices.



