

STRIKING A DELICATE BALANCE: CARE FOR GOD'S CREATION- PART III

It is frustrating when the mere mention of **protecting the environment** becomes an immediate source of **controversy**. This needn't be the case, even while admitting the potentially contentious nature of such debate. People comfortably settle into their "camps" and as one who sees much more complexity, I am often left feeling rather isolated in my views. Still, several key principles can be appreciated by all, while allowing for a divergence of opinion on particulars. Though a **non-hunter myself**, (never been interested) I haven't the slightest moral objection to it, knowing it to be a vital wildlife management tool. The "carrying capacity" of a given habitat is critical and hunting preserves that. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources does a fantastic job at managing populations and adjusting Hunting Guidelines accordingly.

A civilized society seeks to ensure the long-term viability of its animal population. Endangered Species protection is crucial...Do you recall **Ling-Ling** and **Hsing-Hsing**, the giant pandas exchanged as a gift between Mao Zedong, representing the Chinese government and President Nixon in 1972? As a child, I was fascinated by them. And it served at the time as a symbol of **diplomatic rapprochement** between two governments with a tense relationship. Perhaps it is time to repeat the exercise! In 2016, in a sure sign of progress, that species was removed from endangered list and downgraded to vulnerable. We are all familiar with the story of the bald eagle and its struggles, largely due to DDT, an insecticide that wreaked tremendous havoc until it was banned in 1973. In 1963, the number of eagles in the lower 48 **had fallen** to just 417 wild pairs. That is truly scary.

In **Laudato Si** (24 May 2015), Pope Francis writes as a pastor. He offers moral guidance, as distinguished from a detailed set of policy proposals. Paragraph #61 makes this **distinction** clear, though the faithful are to adhere to this teaching "with religious assent" as Vatican II teaches in *Lumen Gentium* paragraph #25. We read in paragraph #340 of the Catechism: "God wills the *interdependence of creatures*. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the **service** of each other." Pope Francis' encyclical echoes this ideal: "Each creature has its own purpose...and the entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us." (Para. #84)

In his biography of St. Francis of Assisi, Thomas of Celano told several stories about Francis that highlight his great love of creation. Surely, **not all** would share this same level of love. For example, he relates: "Even towards little worms he glowed with exceeding love, because he had read that word concerning the Savior, 'I am a worm, and no man.' Wherefore he used to pick them up in the way and put them in a safe place, that they might not be crushed by the feet of passers by." (*Life of St. Francis*, I, 29,81) A bit **extreme**? Indeed, and yet it demonstrated a firm belief that God is present in some way in all his creatures. Far from mere romanticism, St. Bonaventure noted that Francis rightly spoke of creatures as "brother" or "sister," for such language affects how we treat nature and **respect** it. Still, the first chapters of Genesis confirm that man is given **dominion** over creation, and rightly uses it for a noble purpose.

Recent evidence from Michigan's Upper Peninsula shows that when the **wolf** population is strong, deer-vehicle collisions decreased by 24%. Why? Because the wolves scared away the deer from the roadside! The cycle of nature is harsh—prey and predators engage in an **epic battle** for survival. Nature is harsh, and too often we "city-folk" fail to appreciate this in a way our rural brothers and sisters see up close. Wild animals are not pets, nor are farm animals. Animals may **never** be placed on an equal footing with human beings. We are endowed with immortal souls and it is a grave error to fail to take into account this radical difference. Still, it is imperative to account for the

environmental effect of various projects (e.g., highways, water dams) on nature. (cf. LS, #35) Environmental studies are expensive, but can be carried out in a way that both protects biodiversity while allowing for human development. Keystone Pipeline defenders point out that such transport is safer and more environmentally friendly than trucking oil across the highways. Too often, partisanship obscures the facts.

These **environmental issues** are complex, and I do not believe any side has all the answers. The Church, while not an expert on climate change, is situated to provide broad principles about the care of God's creation. The faithful laity are encouraged to educate themselves on a broad range of issues. If we are able to refrain from automatically demonizing those who hold different views from us, we may be able to learn something of value from divergent positions, **sifting** through to discover the truth. It is a delicate balance. Admittedly, I have much to learn. But I am willing to put in the effort to get up to speed. After all, God's creation is worth it!

- We congratulate our new priests, ordained Saturday for service in the Church. One of them, **Fr. Brian Fischer**, will celebrate his Mass of Thanksgiving here this afternoon (Sunday), followed by an outdoor reception. He will lead a particular life as a diocesan hermit, not working in a parish, but primarily leading a life of prayer for the people of God. Church Law (Canon 603 §2) provides for this arrangement.
- Admittedly, the term “personality priest” is used pejoratively; yet at times it succinctly describes the **dangers** of straying from our roots. While marking my 32nd anniversary of ordination, I am reminded that the office of pastor is not for the benefit of the one to whom it is entrusted, but for the pastoral and sacramental care of God's people. It is about Jesus Christ and service to the Church. When priests amass robust social media followings, I see red flags.
- The spring has not been kind to the **Minnesota Twins!** I hope that June brings about a turnaround and the team can turn it around as the summer sun sets in! It is not too late to show improvement, but the extra-innings record (0-8) is as mathematically improbable as it is frustrating. Hope “summers” eternal!
- The “Cathedral” grey fox kit (pictured in sidebar) continues to show signs of improvement. The **Wildlife Rehabilitation Center** is providing me updates– they are amazing! He may be there three more weeks before transfer to a wildlife rehab station with large outdoor cages, all in preparation for being **released** back into the wild. The bill? I hope the little guy has health insurance. 😊
- Our deep Cathedral **window wells** are dangerous, and I would love to see us **install grating**, as you see between the two Selby Ave. doors. A 15-foot drop poses potential dangers for animals and humans alike. If anyone has an interest in contributing to the cost of installing such grating, I'll gladly provide more information.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector

