

09/06/15 23B

-- This past Tuesday was a world day of prayer for the care of creation. The Orthodox have celebrated it for a number of years, but recently Pope Francis proclaimed it a special day of prayer in the Catholic Church.

-- The fact that he had just released his letter on the Care of our Common Home (the earth) earlier this summer probably had something to do with this. You may say, *That's fine, but what does that have to do with God's word today?*

-- Actually, plenty. Isaiah's words today speaks of restoration. Historically, we might think of the people returning to Jerusalem after exile. The picture given here is of individuals with handicaps being restored to health.

-- But it's not limited to individual healing. The earth itself experiences healing. In particular, water is restored to areas that are parched and lifeless. God cares for the earth, and he wants his highest creatures to care for the earth as well.

-- We see this concern in many of the writings of the prophets. Justice demands that people are cared for, especially the poor. But it also calls us to look at the earth as our home which we need to care for as well.

-- St. James, much like many of the Old Testament prophets, calls us to treat the poor with dignity. In our 2nd reading he warns against favoring the rich and powerful. He tells us that the poor are heirs to the kingdom that God has promised to those who love them.

-- Our care for the poor and our care for the creation around us are closely related. Pope Francis has reminded us of that. We know that when natural disasters occur the poor are affected disproportionately.

-- Ten years ago our own country experienced this fact when Hurricane Katrina struck. The vast majority of those who lost their lives were the poor who did not have the means to evacuate the area.

-- Throughout the world, poor areas have suffered because of weather disasters. And, though those may have not been caused by human activity, there is strong scientific evidence that many have been made worse by human activity, particularly its effect upon climate change.

-- The letter of James challenged one Christian community to examine its attitudes toward people of different economic means. Today, we are challenged to examine our attitudes toward both the earth around us and the people around us.

-- The more we see the creation around us simply as something for us to use for our pleasure and comfort, the more likely we are to look at other people that way, especially those "beneath us."

-- On the other hand, if we develop an attitude of care toward the earth, we are more likely to be more caring for human beings around us. We are more likely to reach out to the poor and treat them with dignity.

-- Even though individually we are limited in how we can affect big issues like climate change and global warming, we can do little things which, added together, make a difference.

-- Pope Francis suggested one challenge: limiting our use of air conditioning. One of his cardinals in Rome chuckled at that, aware of the late summer climate there. (We only seemed to get it this past week!)

-- Whatever response we make, our attitude is most important. Do we truly care for the dignity of all people, especially the poor and the powerless? Are we willing to speak up for them?

-- Do we care for the creation around us? Are we willing to take what steps we can to take better care of our earth?

-- God has promised that the earth will be restored. As his creatures made in his image and likeness, we have a part to play in this restoration.