

WE NEED TO TAKE BETTER CARE OF SISTER EARTH

By Richard Rohr, O.F.M.

As a priest of the Franciscan Order, the very first European “invaders” in the States of New Mexico, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and California. I think we have been around long enough to see both the good and the bad that we brought with us. We usually found it congenial to live among the Native peoples of the new world, because they already shared our vision of both a simple and a communal life. In fact, they often taught us how to live it!

Now we see that these ancient values of living close to the earth, and in union with natural creation, are no longer highly prized values in our world or in our country. In fact, we Christians, Catholics, and Franciscans have given little moral leadership to any alternative vision. Strange, considering St. Francis’ daring and clear commitment to nature, simplicity, and non-violence. Strange, considering God’s covenant with Noah, the animals, and “all of creation.” Strange, considering Jesus’ loving observation and praise for the sparrows, the lilies, “living waters” and “rich soil.”

If the nations that built on the Judeo-Christian heritage do not soon see the work of earth care and climate change as a moral and spiritual imperative, one wonders how we will have any moral authority left? As St. Thomas Aquinas said, “Nature is the primary and most perfect revelation of the Divine.” This “Bible” of creation existed for billions of years, and sustained us long enough so we could write the next Bible. For St. Francis, the natural world was not an object to be objectified but a fellow subject that he reverently addressed as “Sister” and “Brother.” Our capital city of Santa Fe is named after him, so there must be a special invitation for us in this “land of enchantment.”

It is sad that we Christians have become so individualistic in our notions of what God is saving that we gradually whittled it down to tiny human groups who always happened to be just like ourselves. Our God became very small in the process, we smaller yet, and the physical world the least of all. There

was little room or appreciation for the wonderful “new earth” that the Bible sees as the very ending (Revelation 21:1) of salvation history.

Jesus told his followers that we would be judged on how we treated “the least” of the brothers and sisters. It seems the very things we all, without exception, share in common—the one earth on which we walk, “Sister Water” who sustains us all, “Brother Sun” who gives life to absolutely everything, have themselves become the very least sisters and brothers of all. It’s rather unbelievable.

Would it be strange, or would it be totally predicted, that these literal “fundamentals” would be the very issues that could bring us all down, bring us all together, or bring us to a universal and all inclusive holiness?