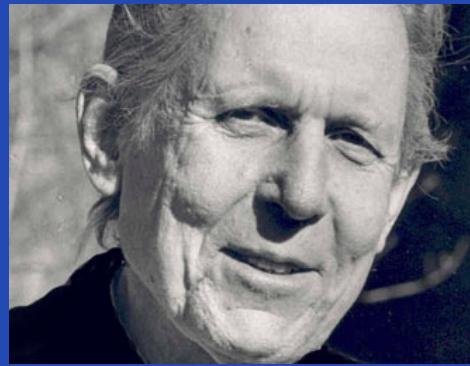


Father Thomas Berry, C.P.

One With the Universe

b. November 9, 1914 - d. June 1, 2009



CALL TO PRAYER

Leader: God of the Universe, we come together to celebrate the life of our brother, Father Thomas Berry, C.P., Ph.D. His love of the Earth, his poetic consciousness, and his prophetic storytelling awaken within us an awareness of the interconnectivity of human nature to the natural environment. Alongside great eco-thinkers like Teilhard de Chardin, Thomas Aquinas, and Saint Francis of Assisi, he brings to light the sacramental sacredness of the Universe, gifting generations with the most precious gift of all: an appreciation for creation. Ecology and social justice, Fr. Berry reminds us, go hand in hand. He thus, underscores the need for moral participation by people of all faith traditions, in order to address environmental challenges and respond to the tragedies of our troubled times.

May we learn from Fr. Berry to be faithful advocates for the environment and its inhabitants and practitioner of universal compassion for all forms of life. With Fr. Thomas Berry by our side, may we "Look up at the sky...The heavens so blue, the sun so radiant...The rivers singing their way to the sea...Wolf song on the land, whale song in the sea...Drenching us all with a deluge of delight...opening our arms and rushing toward each other...moved by that vast compassionate Presence that brings all things together in intimate Celebration...Celebration that is the universe itself." Amen.

Reader 1: Thomas Berry was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, the third of thirteen children. In 1933, he entered the Passionist order and took the name Thomas after Thomas Aquinas. He received his doctorate in history from The Catholic University of America. A cultural historian, Fr. Berry spent decades studying world religions and culture and wrote two books on Asian religions. He was also a lifelong, outspoken advocate for the environment. He taught at Seton Hall, St. John's University, and Fordham University, and served as the director of the Riverdale Center of Religious Research for more than 20 years. Father Berry's work gradually shifted from religious history to a history of the Earth and the universe.

A self-described “geologian,” Fr. Berry emphasized his vision for a spirituality grounded in the sacredness of the Earth. He called for universal compassion for all forms of life and a departure from anthropocentrism that places humans over the rest of creation. Father Berry’s work and philosophy have impacted numerous fields, from childhood education to environmental law. Many of his words touch on the magnitude of our current ecological crisis and the challenges for the global community. In a spirit of openness, let us reflect on Fr. Berry’s words and his Gospel call for a renewed and sustainable kinship with the Universe and the Earth community that is continually being shaped.

All: May Thomas Berry’s words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the vast community of life.

Reader 2: “We come into being in and through the Earth. Simply put, we are Earthlings. The Earth is our origin, our nourishment, our educator, our healer, our fulfillment. At its core, even our spirituality is Earth derived. The human and the Earth are totally implicated, each in the other. If there is no spirituality in the Earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves” (*The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*).



After a moment of silence, reader 2 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry’s words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Think of an example of an individual or group that has a strong “spirituality in the Earth.” Reflect on your own spirituality to nature.

All: May Thomas Berry’s words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 3: “We’ve been caught up in a mechanistic world, because what we make, makes us. We make the automobile, the automobile makes us. We make an industrial economy, the industrial economy makes us. We are now in a weird dream world of industrial technological imagination. Who would be so destructive to the very basis out of which we exist, that we spoil our water and our air? For what? To invent an industrial economy.” (*The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*).

PRAYER SERVICE

After a moment of silence, reader 3 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Think of a new technology that impacts our physical environment. Who is helped and harmed?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 4: "Our relationship with the earth involves something more than pragmatic use, academic understanding, or aesthetic appreciation. A truly human intimacy with the earth and with the entire natural world is needed. Our children should be properly introduced to the world in which they live" (*The Dream of the Earth*).

After a moment of silence, reader 4 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Do you feel intimately connected to the Earth as Fr. Berry calls us to be? In what ways? In what moments do you feel most aware of the wonder of our natural world?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which they live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 5: "The human is neither an addendum nor an intrusion into the universe. We are quintessentially integral with the universe" (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 5 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- How do you understand humanity's relationship to the Earth through your personal relationship with the Creator?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.



Reader 6: “The naïve assumption that the natural world is there to be possessed and used by humans for their advantage and in an unlimited manner cannot be accepted” (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 6 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry’s words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Fr. Berry challenges us to move beyond the idea of humans as possessors or stewards of the earth. Rather, we are integrated with the Earth and must coexist in communion with all forms of natural life. Do you feel integrated with the Earth or set apart from it? What activities make you feel more integrated?

All: May Thomas Berry’s words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 7: “...everything has a right to be recognized and revered. Trees have tree rights, insects have insect rights, rivers have river rights, and mountains have mountain rights” (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 7 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry’s words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Think about the last time you felt truly connected to nature. When was the last time you hugged a tree, breathed in the air at the top of the mountain, or waded into a cool river?

All: May Thomas Berry’s words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 8: “...we will recover our sense of wonder and our sense of the sacred only if we appreciate the universe beyond ourselves as a revelatory experience of that numinous presence whence all things came into being. Indeed, the universe is the primary sacred reality. We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us” (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 8 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry’s words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- What might you do to recover your own sense of wonder and sense of the sacred?

All: May Thomas Berry’s words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 9: "Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a completely new sense of reality and value" (*The Dream of the Earth*).

After a moment of silence, reader 9 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- What are some terms that Pope Francis has introduced to connect the environment and the human community?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, inner city children how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 10: "For children to live only in contact with concrete and steel and wires and wheels and machines and computers and plastics, to seldom experience any primordial reality or even to see the stars at night, is soul deprivation that diminishes the deepest of their human experiences" (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).



After a moment of silence, reader 10 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Who are the children in the world today who live in the absence of nature's peace and security? What other social ailments are connected to this iniquity?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 11: "In reality, there is a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human. In this community every being has its own role to fulfill, its own dignity, its own inner spontaneity. Every being has its own voice. Every being declares itself to the entire universe. Every being enters into communion with other beings. (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 11 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Fr. Berry states that every being has its own role to fulfill within the integral community of the Earth. What role do you play in caring for the Earth?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 12: "Education and religion, especially, should awaken in the young an awareness of the world in which they live, how it functions, how the human fits into the larger community of life, the role that the human fulfills in the great story of the universe, and the historical sequence of developments that have shaped our physical and cultural landscape. Along with this awareness of the past and present, education and religion should communicate some guidance concerning the future" (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).



After a moment of silence, reader 12 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- How can education and religion awaken in today's youth an awareness of the important role they play as protectors of our common home and peacekeepers in our troubled world?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 13: "What is needed is a new pattern of rapport with the planet. Here we come to the critical transformation needed in the emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, and religious orders of life. Only a change that profound in human consciousness can remedy the deep cultural pathology manifest in such destructive behavior. Such change is not possible, however, so long as we fail to appreciate the planet that provides us with a world abundant in the volume and variety of food for our nourishment, a world exquisite in supplying beauty of form, sweetness of taste, delicate fragrances for our enjoyment, and exciting challenges for us to overcome with skill and action. The poets and artists can help restore this sense of rapport with the natural world. It is this renewed sense of reciprocity with nature, in all of its complexity and remarkable beauty, that can help provide the psychic and spiritual energies necessary for the work ahead" (*The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century*).

After a moment of silence, reader 13 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- How different would our world be if every individual viewed the world, and his or her role in it, as Fr. Berry did? How does reverence for the Earth translate into action?
- Reflect on two ways that you can help restore rapport with the natural world.

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

Reader 14: "As we enter the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a moment of grace. Such moments are privileged moments. The great transformations of the universe occur at such times. The future is defined in some enduring pattern of its functioning" (*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*).

After a moment of silence, reader 14 invites participants to reflect privately or communally on one or more of the following questions:

- How are you inspired by Fr. Berry's words? How do his words challenge you to think outside the box?
- Think of a graced moment when you really experienced God's presence in nature and in the human community. What did you learn from that graced moment?

All: May Thomas Berry's words awaken in us a deeper awareness of the world in which we live, how it functions, and how we fit into the larger community of life.

CLOSING PRAYER

God, your good and faithful servant, Thomas Berry, reminds us that we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth, and healed by the Earth. We recommit to protecting our Common Home and all her inhabitants. May we come to see the natural world as a sacred community to which we each belong. "To be alienated from this community is to become destitute in all that makes us human. To damage this community is to diminish our own existence." Each day, as we look at the sky or listen to the song of the wind, may we remember that Earth is our origin, our nourishment, our educator, our healer, and our fulfillment. Amen.

Recommend Readings

Thomas Berry's notable works on ecology and religion include:

- *Thomas Berry Selected Writings on the Earth Community* - <http://bit.ly/2dqcKL1>
- *The Dream of the Earth* - <http://bit.ly/2db5sAF>
- *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* - <http://bit.ly/2dI7mrc>
- *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century* <http://bit.ly/2cZAXZe>