



International Solidarity Reflection

School Sisters of Notre Dame

Shalom

Integral Ecology

February 2023

Introduction

Following Pope Francis' lead, we SSNDs and Associates join peoples around the world to "Care for our Common Home." We are a *Laudato Si'* community. This leads us to become more and more at home with integrating our very lives and relationships as peoples who are one with all creatures. Hesitantly, yet urgently, we dare to commit ourselves to integrate our concerns for the economy, environment, culture, family and daily life. We open our hearts to trust the Indigenous who wisely value all creatures, to live close to the land, to live gratefully, sharing what they have and using only what they need. Indigenous around the world have suffered severely and continue to suffer from racism, exclusion and oppression. Indigenous have led the way and now rise to claim their own rightful place in creation.

All this belongs to *Integral Ecology*. Ecology includes the full scale of all life from microscopic bacteria to processes that span the entire planet. Spirituality, the economy and the environment all mutually affect each other. They are not separate. Separating them destroys them. We suffer the effects and call it 'normal.' It is *not normal*. It is blind. *Integral Ecology* takes us to the heart of our charism, to be one, to love and to let God be love for our Earth community. It is prophetic, denouncing evils of environmental destruction and leading us to live what we desire and dream. Unity, compassion, and love are *normal* to God.

Call to Prayer

Pause briefly after each part:

Remember the Creator's love for every creature, for all peoples and all the Earth community ... every plant, insect, animal and person. Imagine God loving us all very affectionately and tenderly, with great longing and delight. Let us feel our pulse by putting our fingers on our neck or wrist and feeling the gentle rhythm, "Gift of God. Gift of Life. Gift of God. Gift of Life." And this will continue until God invites us home to see God fully. Look at a tree or plant. Receive oxygen from the tree or plant. Give it carbon dioxide. Continue to do this quietly for a few minutes. Savor being one with the tree. In view of the great mystery of your own being and Earth, be aware of anything that is real within you. Ask and listen, "God, how are you with me in this, in my real experience or feeling?"

Together: Creator Spirit, Love, Mystery and Life. Thank YOU. We trust You and your desire to have us all to delight in knowing You as You reveal yourself to us in all peoples and creatures, in the entire Earth community. We love You and thank You, Love beyond imagining.

Mary, you sang out that your whole being rejoices in God. Draw us into the dance with you, to let go of all that cripples our trusting and daring, of all that stiffens our free spirits and suffocates our imagining, of all that destroys our Earth.

(Sing a favorite hymn of creation, such as the Magnificat)

Experience

Staff and four hundred high school girls in Juba, South Sudan, were hungry, every day. A teacher fainted in weakness. When others or we could get enough money to offer them a plate of beans and rice, they rejoiced, sang and danced, “*Enough is a Feast.*” Since then, “Enough is a Feast” is my mantra.

Not long after me, a new student arrived at the Maryknoll Language School in Cochabamaba, Bolivia, and fell sick. I went to buy a bottle of aspirin. The clerk in the tiny hut was clearly shocked and asked, “You want the *whole* bottle . . . for *yourself*?” “Oh, no thank you. May I please have two aspirin?” A priest experienced the same when he tried to buy a package of cigarettes. “You want the *whole* package . . . for *yourself*?”

A few young SSNDs from the global south dramatized some of their experiences of living with communities in San Antonio, Texas. “And in our house, we have two sets of dishes. *Why would we have two sets?*” “I do not know. We also have so many. Some people have many more clothes than they can wear. *I wonder why they get and keep so many. I do not understand.*” That very week, our communities sorted out what we could give to those who had recently been hit by a tornado and others who were new migrants.

Reflection

As we experience being loved, learning to accept love and to love, we can relax, and let our hearts open to *our true identity* as part of all creation, as one with all creatures. Perhaps we could all sigh aloud! What a relief it is to *recognize* that we *are* all one. That is our true identity. Creation is the first way of knowing God’s presence, the first sacrament.

What is normal? Our perspectives, globally, tend to isolate thinking, feeling, praying, care for the Earth, needs of those excluded, our work, our play, our health and the well-being of our planet. How did we ever come to regard pollution and a consumer mentality as *normal*? Our body-mind-spirit integrity rebels. “Our bodies tell the truth.” We are created as one. Already.

Share now with a neighbor or the entire group an awareness or feeling that is real for you now. What is our group experience?

Actions

Look gently at others, peoples, animals, plants, insects around you today. Imagine understanding that we are already totally one. Imagine that our created reality means that we are one with peoples of all races, orientations, economic differences and educational opportunities. Take time to talk with someone you consider different from you. Allow all the healing, the good, and God’s power that makes us one. Try speaking others’ languages. Walk through a forest trail or along a river with all as one, as God creates us, ever new, daily. Drive less, fly less, pick up trash, eat less meat, use less energy, work for clean water, and plant trees. Make a presentation in your local church about integral ecology. What else can you do?

Closing Prayer

Creator Spirit, tender, creative, compassionate Love, enkindle our hearts. Thank You for calling us always to let go of our defenses. Thank You for creating us as ONE with all peoples and all Earth’s creatures, one in cosmic unity. Thank You for firing our imaginations to glimpse what this unity means for YOU, what it looks like. Amen.

*Prepared by Barbara Paleczny SSND of the Atlantic-Midwest Province for the International Shalom Network.
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