

Last weekend I spoke about how all of creation reflects the glory of the Creator. This weekend we can consider how all of creation also shares in the redeeming work of God. In the second reading from St Paul's letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:1-11) we hear that 'all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus'. In other letters St Paul also speaks of Jesus being the one who 'reconciles to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross' (Col 1:20, cf. Eph 1:10). In other words Jesus came not only to save human souls, but to restore all of creation to unity and harmony with the Creator. The Church at Vatican II in the document *Gaudium et Spes* put it like this, paraphrasing from the letters of Sts Peter and Paul found in the New Testament:

'We are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling and a new earth in which righteousness dwells, and all of creation will be set free from its bondage to decay' (*Gaudium et Spes* 39).

The same paragraph of this document goes on to say that 'far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on'. In other words we have a part to play in helping creation achieve its ultimate purpose. Christ invites us to share in his work of redemption.

During his public ministry Jesus showed himself to be attentive to nature. His parables are full of references to plants and animals. Even the parable in today's Gospel (Matthew 21:28-32) features a vineyard, and this is not a random selection but would invite his original hearers to go back to images in the prophet Isaiah which speak of Israel as the 'vineyard of the Lord'.

In the Gospel according to John there are fewer parables than in the other Gospels but it is in John that Jesus speaks of the grain of wheat that falls and dies and only then yields a rich harvest (John 12:23). Jesus is using what happens in nature to explain the significance of what will soon happen to him. Any time we sow a seed and see it later bear fruit we can be reminded of Jesus who died and rose again to save us and all of creation. We can see God in all things if we only make the time to look.

Some elements of creation are blessed in a particular way because they are used by God in the Sacraments to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Water, olive oil, bread, wine, as well as the words and gestures of human beings, become the means by which the redeeming work of Christ is communicated to us. I remember a priest who I knew in my childhood who had spent part of the Second World War as a prisoner in a concentration camp saying, 'never throw bread in the bin, at least put it somewhere that the birds can eat it'. If you see me throwing bread to the ducks in Boutham Park it is because I remember hearing that. I am sure his words reflect not only his war time experience of hunger but also reflect the fact that it is through the form of bread that Jesus has chosen to be present to us in the Eucharist. Pope Francis in his letter *Laudato Si* (paragraph 236) speaks of the Eucharist as 'joining heaven and earth, embracing and penetrating all creation. Thus the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation'.

Next Sunday is the date of the feastday of Saint Francis of Assisi and the end of this 'season of creation'. We have also been promised a new encyclical letter from Pope Francis further developing his teaching on the environment and particularly its importance for human flourishing. Thus I will prepare a further homily on this theme but I may wait until the encyclical letter is actually issued so that I can share some of the ideas in this letter with you.

A video version of the homily can be found at: <https://youtu.be/HUepa5Fukv4>