Blessing of the Animals ~ Feast of Saint Francis of Assisi (October 4)

This custom is in remembrance of St. Francis of Assisi's love for all creatures. Francis loved the larks flying about his hilltop town and wrote a *Canticle of All Creatures*, an ode to God's living things.

Animals are frequently mentioned throughout Scripture. As example:

Proverbs 12:10, "the righteous man regards the life of his beast." **Genesis 9**, after the flood, it is mentioned five times that "I will make a covenant with you and with all living creatures." **Deuteronomy 22 and Exodus 23**, "if you see an animal that is overburdened, you should lighten its load to help it." **Job 12: 7-10,** "ask the birds, ask the beasts and they will teach you." **Matthew 6:26** "birds of the air".

For blessings, consult the Book of Blessings or use one of the blessings below:

The Roman Ritual - The Book of Blessings Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the Conference of Catholic Bishops and confirmed by the Apostolic See. **942** According to the providence of the Creator, many animals have a certain role to play in human existence by helping with work or providing food and clothing. Thus when the occasion arises, for example, the feast of some saint, the custom of invoking God's blessing on animals may be continued.

- *"Blessed are you, Lord God, maker of all living creatures. You called forth fish in the sea, birds in the air and animals on the land. You inspired St. Francis to call all of them his brothers and sisters. We ask you to bless these pets. By the power of your love, enable them and all of us to live according to your plan. May we always praise you for all your beauty in Creation. Blessed are you, Lord our God, in all your creatures! Amen."*

- *Heavenly Father, our human ties with friends of other species are a wonderful and special gift from you. We now ask you to grant our special animal companions your Fatherly care and healing power for any suffering they have. Give us, their human friends, new understanding of our responsibilities to them and to all your creatures. They have trust in us, as we have trust in you. We are on this beautiful earth together to give each other friendship, affection, and caring. Your goodness is turned upon every living thing and your grace flows to all. We bless you...we praise you...we give you thanks! Amen.*

As the prayer is offered, the pets and all can be gently sprinkled with holy water.
A procession of the pets to the location of the blessing could begin the ritual.
The pets' names could be spoken aloud during the prayer.

Dear God
Bless our pets. We love them so much.
And bless the other animals; they are a part of our family too.
Take extra good care of the ones in trouble, like the polar bears, the



African elephants, the snow leopards, and all those frogs.
Don't forget the really tiny ones like protozoan and the ones in plankton.



Then bless the homo sapiens so we can do a good job helping you look out for the others.

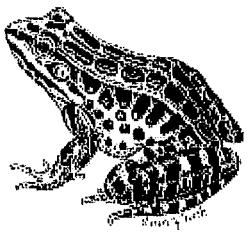


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Young Catholics, An Ancient Faith, A New Century

Creation Care as a Tool in the New Evangelization

On June 28, 2010, the eve of the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul, Pope Benedict XVI created the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization. Although much has been written about the various aspects of the New Evangelization initiative, one element of the Church's mission that has received significantly less attention is the Church's tradition of creation care. This is an unfortunate gap in the New Evangelization, particularly with respect to the evangelization of millennial Catholics. This is especially true since a majority of millennials are concerned about the environment, yet are also the least "religious" generation by a number of different metrics.

Given the Church's rich tradition of caring for God's creation, this aspect of Catholic teaching can thus serve as a valuable means by which to connect with millennial Catholics and strengthen the New Evangelization. I first heard this observation from Dr. Tobias Winright, Associate Professor of Theological Ethics at St. Louis University, at A Catholic Consultation on Environmental Justice and Climate Change: Assessing Pope Benedict XVI's Ecological Vision for the Catholic Church in the United States last year. In terms of utilizing the Church's creation care tradition as a tool in the New Evangelization, the Franciscan Earth Corps project of the Franciscan Action Network—a member of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change—provides an excellent model, showing how Catholic teaching on creation can be used as an evangelizing tool with millennial Catholics.

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION

Much has been written about what the New Evangelization is and is not. In general, however, a careful reading of key magisterial documents reveals three key aspects of the New Evangelization:

1. "The New Evangelization calls each of us to deepen our faith, believe in the Gospel message and go forth to proclaim the Gospel." -U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *What is the New Evangelization?*

2. It calls us to propose the Gospel "to those regions awaiting the first evangelization." -Pope Benedict XVI, Homily of First Vespers on the Solemnity of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, 2010

3. It directs us to re-propose the Gospel to those "Catholics [who have] lost a living sense of faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church." -Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, no. 33

The third aspect of the New Evangelization has been widely recognized as perhaps the initiative's most innovative aspect, and this element is particularly important with respect to the millennial generation.

According to a number of different metrics, the millennial generation—including millennial Catholics—is less "religious" than any other cohort. For example, the Pew Center on Religion and Public Life reports that millennials overall are generally the least likely to:

- be "religiously affiliated"
- identify as a "strong member" of their tradition
- attend religious services weekly
- read Scripture weekly
- pray daily
- say religion is "very important" in their lives
- have "certain belief in God"

Millennial Catholics were no exception to this trend.

Although millennials, including Catholics, are the generation that is least inclined towards religion, a large number of millennials are deeply concerned about the envirtnoment and engaged with environmental issues. The Pew Research Center has found that:

- 36% of millennials buy organic foods

- 53% of millennials conscientiously purchase "green" products

- 69% of millennials recycle from home

Similarly, Rock the Vote found that in 2010, 69% of U.S. millennial voters were "concerned that the country is failing to take action on global warming or climate change."

Given this strong inclination towards ecological concern and a strong disinclination towards religion, it is here that the New Evangelization might draw upon the Church's teaching on creation in order to re-propose the Gospel to millennial Catholics. The Church has a rich tradition of creation care and attention to climate change, and those who are especially involved in the New Evangelization might use this teaching as an on-ramp to advance into deeper conversation with millennial Catholics about faith and the Gospel.

One of the most basic pedagogical techniques is to "meet people where they are," and within the context of the New Evangelization, this could take the form of affirming a young person's ecological concern, pointing out that the Church has a rich body of teaching on the environment, and then proceeding into other comparable areas of faith and Christian life. Pope John Paul II affirmed in his encyclical *Centesimus Annus* that "the Church's *social teaching* is itself a valid *instrument of evangelization*" (no. 54, emphasis in original), and highlighting the Church's tradition of creation care as part of the New Evangelization can certainly be used as an extension of the insight of John Paul II in light of the current "signs of the times."

FRANCISCAN ACTION NETWORK'S *EARTH CORPS*

As with any ministry, the use of creation care as a tool in the New Evangelization will likely look different depending on the particular situation, context, audience, etc. One model of how this tradition might be used to help millennial Catholics develop a deeper faith life is the Franciscan Action Network's *Franciscan Earth Corps* project. Through this initiative, a local community first selects a project, charitable cause, or justice activity that is somehow tied to ecology and then registers as a chapter with Earth Corps. Examples of such activities might include urban or community gardening, hiking, advocacy work, ecological restoration, or beautification/landscaping.

Once a project has been selected and undertaken, the Earth Corps initiative then invites the group to engage in regular group reflection using themes from Franciscan spirituality. Ideally this reflection occurs after each period of work, and provides an intentional space in which group members process their experiences and come to a deeper awareness of how their work is intimately connected with their Catholic faith. For example, a group working in an urban/community garden might reflect on the Church's recognition that the poor are most vulnerable to environmental degradation. A group involved in hiking or beautification/landscaping might reflect on the incarnational nature of Christianity and how this is particularly present in Franciscan spirituality. Groups that choose to work on a climate advocacy project could reflect on the Church's justice tradition and/or the concept of structural sin.

In order to help facilitate spiritual reflection on a group's environmental project, Earth Corps recommends that leaders utilize the spiritual resources available from the Franciscan Action Network. In addition, Earth Corps groups might also take advantage of the many resources available from the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, of which the Franciscan Action Network is a member and with whom I work.

Rhett Engelking, Program Manager for Franciscan Earth Corps, feels that this initiative can serve as a valuable means by which to help millennial Catholics make important connections between ecology, faith, and the many aspects of a dynamic Christian life, no matter which ecological project an Earth Corps group chooses and however the group decides to reflect spiritually on its experience, Engelking sees experiential learning coupled with intentional spiritual reflection as a crucial means by which to foster lasting "eco-conversion" in persons and society, and believes that ecological orthopraxy is a

valuable means by which to re-propose the Gospel to all Catholics, especially those in the millennial generation.

CONCLUSION

In *Sustainability and Catholic Higher Education: A Toolkit for Mission Integration* from the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, the Most Reverend William S. Skylstad, Bishop Emeritus of Spokane, Honorary Chairman of the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change, and past president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, pointed out that the Church's teaching on creation care "must therefore be integral to the mission, identity and everyday life of" Catholic ministries and institutions.

Given the fact that many millennial Catholics have a natural inclination towards ecological concern, the bishop's words are especially relevant to the Church's New Evangelization. Lifting up and highlighting Catholic teaching on creation care and climate change can be an effective on-ramp by which to invite millennial Catholics into a deeper faith life, and the Earth Corps project provides one example of how to more effectively act on the insight of *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which states* that "*[t]he Church's social doctrine is an integral part of her evangelizing ministry.*"

Updated: Changes have been made to the second paragraph to recognize Dr. Tobias Winright's observation from last year.