

The World Around Us  
A Meditation, August 10, 2022

Mitakuye Oyasin - that's a Lakota phrase that means "we are all related". Not a bad idea to put forth in this time of so much divisiveness - a time to recognize the true bond that exists within the human race. But what the Lakota phrase really refers to is the relatedness that exists within the whole of Creation - that we share in a oneness that includes animals and insects, as well as trees, plants, rock, rivers, and mountains. In a letter attributed to Chief Seattle of the Suquamish and Duwamish tribes in the Pacific Northwest, he writes, "Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect."

When I was a child one of the things, I most enjoyed doing was taking long solitary walks in the woods. There was something about the fresh smell of the air, the dappled sunlight that filtered through the trees, the silence broken only by the rustling of the leaves by a gentle breeze. At the time I was too naive to see that I was experiencing those woods in more than an aesthetic way, but something more profound - that I was not something apart from that which surrounded me, but, instead, a part of it.

This, of course, is not a way of seeing the world that we are accustomed to. In fact, it is a worldview contrary to what the Church has traditionally taught. The creation story in Genesis speaks of the creation as something we have "dominion" over. As a result, we have come to see nature as something we are to overcome, to subdue, even to conquer. Nature becomes something made for our benefit, something we are even entitled to exploit. But is that what the Creator intended? Could dominion actually mean stewardship - that it is that which we are called to care for, something we are meant to live in harmony with?

There have been those in the Church who have recognized the sense of relatedness. In his best-known prayer called, "The Canticle of Brother Sun", Francis of Assisi speaks of our Sister Mother Earth, and addresses the Sun, the Moon, fire, water, and wind as either Brother or Sister. Although the canticle does point to all these things as being for our benefit, it does move in the direction of an intimate God given relationship.

Although I do not expect the Church, or Western society, to alter its attitude or relationship to Sister Mother Earth in any drastic way overnight, but in light of our current ecological situation it may behoove us to re-examine the way in which we see and relate to the world around us.

Peace and love, David