

The Word in Creation



A certain philosopher asked Abba Antony,
“Abba, how can you be so happy
when you are deprived of the consolation of books?”
Antony replied, “my book, O philosopher, is all creation,
and any time I want to Read the words of God,
the book is before me.”

SAYINGS OF THE DESERT MONASTICS

In the Creation Stories of the Book of Genesis, the relationship of the original human beings with the rest of creation is so beautifully and poetically detailed: naming, delighting, strolling together in the lush garden, and knowing themselves formed from the soil of the earth and spirited with the breath of the Creator. The message is so clear: we are people born of the earth and universe!

Genesis recounts an encouraged interplay and dialogue with all that is created-with the exception of the tree of knowledge in the middle of the garden. This tree is beautiful, alluring, and to be appreciated, but not partaken of. Yet, the temptation is strong, and once indulged, fear and hiding begin. Failures of trust surface. No longer are those first humans strolling the garden in the cool of the evening, conversing with their Maker. Their relations with one another and, ultimately, with all creation, increasingly bear the marks of pain, suffering, shame, alienation, and domination. And yet, God does not give up on them, but clothes them-a beginning of redemption/salvation, and an opening to the possibility of reconciliation in the midst of life's estrangement and limitations.

Reflecting on the words of Abba Antony, one of the early desert monastics, he is not ascetically renouncing literature. Books are wonderful, and can inspire such creative imagination! At the heart of monastic life and practice is *lectio divina*, sacred reading, especially of the Scriptures. Yet, Abba Antony reminds us how important it is to also read (*lectio*) each moment and all of created reality around us. If growth in knowledge does not lead to deeper communion and dialogue, we find ourselves more estranged from each other, from life itself, and from all creation. This has been a challenge from the

beginning, and is ever more important in a world of scientific achievement and globalization with ever-new possibilities of communication, yet a world tending towards alienation, separation and domination.

“God saw that all of creation is good...and God rested on the seventh day” Shabbat-Sabbath- is a time for God to appreciate and dialogue with all that is. We have been created in this image of God, and brought to life with the breath of God's own Spirit. We too are invited to enter into this rest, this *lectio*, an ongoing call to bring redemption and salvation. In this dialogue of appreciation and communion, we discover that every element of matter and spirit in the cosmos is found in each of us. Creation is not an object to be analyzed and used. In creation we encounter our very selves.

“For all creation awaits with eager hope the revelation of the children of God; ...and creation itself will be set free to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (cf. *Romans 8*)

As monks this is the heart of our prayer and work! The monastic promise of stability is not a choice to remain staid or static; rather it is to be in dynamic relationship with one another, and with the land and earth that has been bequeathed to us-the sacred place from which we can search for life and encounter God.

Deeply a part of our baptismal commitment is our connection to the earth and to all creation. In this country, global warming is too slowly being acknowledged as a reality that is harming the earth, and bringing disastrous consequences to the majority of our brothers and sisters, especially to the poor, from humans to so-called inanimate life.

Here at the Priory we continue to earnestly seek ways in which we can grow consciously and act responsibly with the energy resources available to us, while exploring renewable sources of energy for the future. The beautiful new plaza and walkway in front of the chapel are formed of the rocks and stones from our land and native Vermont granite. The small barn structures, recently raised, shelter the sheep and rabbits, the chickens and pigs, and the llama that enhance our life. These are part of us, and we are part of them!

An ecological vision today is a deeply religious quest. We are related to the sun and stars; to the electric power that lights our way and to the fossil fuels that foster our life; to the waters that refresh us and quench our thirst; to the trees that shade us and to the grass under our feet; to the animals who accompany us and to the soil that nurtures and gives us nutrition. All creation is part of us and we are part of this earth and universe!

It is time to renew our knowledge of creation with the poetry of Genesis and the living relationship with all that is. The “knowing” into which we are invited is, in its scriptural meaning, the relationship of the intimacy of mutually vulnerable intercourse and dialogue. We must continue the dialogue (the *lectio*) that leads to communion; otherwise our mere objective knowledge will lead to further alienation and estrangement-to the loss of our very soul! We have the responsibility to care and to be concerned; we *are* the “keepers” of all that is created. ✚

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