

March 1, 2009

Reflection from John Surette, SJ

The rainbow covenant (Genesis 9:8-10)

“God said to Noah: See, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendents after you and with every living creature that was with you...”

The covenant that is most familiar to us is not this one involving Noah as described in our first reading but the covenant God made with the Israelites on Mt. Sinai involving Moses where God said:

“I will be your God and you will be my people.” And being God’s people meant keeping the Ten Commandments that were given to Moses on that mountain.

This Mosaic covenant involved God and humans. Humanity was considered to constitute the sacred community here on Earth. A lot of good things resulted from that covenant. The problem, however, is that all the other creatures in God’s Universe were not included. They were not considered to be that important. They were not seen members of the sacred community. It was as if God did not include them within the Divine embrace.



With this understanding it was easy, with the passage of time, for Earth to be experienced merely as the background, the backdrop, in front of which the sacred history of God and human-kind is played out.

Is this not the way many of us have experienced and looked upon Earth?

The Well

*A Center for our
Sacred Unity with God,
Earth, and One
Another.*

1515 W. Ogden Ave.
LaGrange Park, IL 60526
www.csjthewell.org
thewell@csjoseph.org

*A Center for our
Sacred Unity with
God,
Earth, and One
Another.*

1515 W. Ogden Ave.
LaGrange Park, IL 60526
www.csjthewell.org
thewell@csjoseph.org

It is not that important. Earth is just a backdrop, like the scenery on the stage of a play. We can arrange the backdrop according to our whims. We can use it. We can even destroy it if we want.

The covenant mentioned in our first reading of this first Sunday of Lent is different. God said to Noah that he and his descendents and all other living things and the whole of Creation constitute the sacred community. Everyone and everything is important. Everyone and everything is included within the Divine embrace.

In this covenant Earth is not a backdrop for the human adventure. Fish, birds, and all the animals; rocks, rivers, and woodlands; air, water, and soils, are all members of the sacred community. We humans are not in charge of the community of life. We are not in control of it. We are members of that community and as such we have our privileges and also our responsibilities.

So now it becomes a crime against the covenant with Noah to destroy the forests or cause species of life to go into extinction or to fill in the wetlands. So now it is sinful to pollute the air, make the waters toxic, and sprinkle carcinogens into the soils. To avoid all of these and other ecologically destructive activities becomes a new set of commandments, commandments not carved in stone but written on our hearts and consciences as we experience the withering of Earth at the beginning of this 21st century.

The sign of this covenant between God and whole Universe is the rainbow set in the sky. Who among us is not moved at the sight of a rainbow? The next time you see a rainbow, say the prayer found in today's responsorial psalm:

“Your ways, O Lord, are love and truth to those who keep your covenant.”