

Mercy to Earth

During this wonderful Eastertime I am aware of two emotions that seem to be felt by those who witnessed Jesus' dying and his rising – grief and joy. Think of any story of this Easter season and notice how these feelings well up. My favorite is the scene of Mary Magdalene, arriving at the tomb that Easter morning (perhaps she never left!). Such devotion and love for Jesus yielded grief at the violence of his death and loss she experienced. And then, hearing her name spoken so tenderly again from his lips, “Mary.” And her joyful response, “Rabboni!”

This interplay of grief and joy reminds me of a work of the U.S. poet, Mary Oliver. Oliver notices “We shake with joy, we shake with grief. What a time they have these two, housed as they are in the same body.” We know these feelings and we experience how quickly one yields to the other in our daily life.

As we approach Earth Day 2018 grief and joy can, once again, play out in our experience on multiple levels. In *Laudato Sí* Pope Francis reminds us that this wonderful world of ours is a sacrament, a place of communion with God and our neighbors. Creation is the venue where the divine and human meet (#9). Oh, what joy to partake in this communion.

But, the joy can be short-lived! For example, when the U.S. President announced his decision to pull out of the Paris Climate Agreement and to cease implementing steps to reach the country's carbon reduction targets our leadership of the Sisters of the Americas, called this action "deeply troubling" and "disturbing," and "denounced" this and multiple other actions and attitudes gaining energy in the U.S. This situation seemed devastating. And yet. No sooner was the announcement of the U.S. impending withdrawal made when the swell of the #We're Still In movement erupted! Across the US states, businesses, universities, citizens rose up to take action to assure that the US keeps its promise of reducing emissions and delivers the country's climate goals of the Paris Agreement. It now seems that the original goals will be exceeded.

When we hear and witness the millions of people displaced from their homes, livelihoods, families and a dignified life we are filled with grief. We know that members of our human family are weeping, anguishing for water, clean air, healthcare, food, a safe place to live and raise children – so many people suffer the effects of greed, global warming, violence, cruelty, abandonment and indifference - while others take a disproportionate share of the resources of this earth.

When I talk to people about the situations that exist for the world and its inhabitants I often hear “I am so depressed – this catastrophic devastation is overwhelming.”

However, let us unite in solidarity, in whatever way we can, regardless of the hour we recognize our call; let us join so many others working together to resist and contest what is happening in this dear fragile home. We know, and Pope Francis assures us, that “all is not lost.” Francis insists “while we are capable of the worst, we are also capable of ...choosing again what is good” (205). We are grateful as we watched hosts of people coming to aid of our brothers and sisters. Groups like the Catholic Relief Service, Caritas International, and the multiple partners who extend Mercy wherever the need arises. We are reminded the saying often attributed to Oscar Romero “We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing this. This enables us to do something...It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.”

As this Earth Day approaches, with the focus on Plastic Pollution, let us resolve to do something. Let us recognize our complicity in this huge environmental problem; let us allow ourselves to feel the grief of such at this environmental

mess. Then let us work with so many others and experience the joy that comes with the communion of acting in solidarity with others who love! We can “shake with grief” and “shake with joy” and shake with Mercy!

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