

Homily August 3 2025 Consider the Lilies © Teresa Elder Hanlon
Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:21-23; Colossians 3:1-5, 8-12; Psalm 90; Luke 12:13-21

The other morning, I woke up around 5 am and tossed and turned, not able to get back to sleep because I was worried about someone else, that they might over extend themselves on my behalf as they had agreed to help out with things for the ordination. I was going over all the ways I could let them know that these requests for assistance are not urgent, that there is lots of time to complete the tasks. That would reduce the pressure they might feel to get things done. My concern for that person that morning kept at me until I finally got up. This is an example of unnecessary worry. Meaningless! As the first reading says, “What do mortals profit from all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? ... Even at night their minds do not rest. This, too, is meaningless.” What did I profit from all that problem solving of a non-issue – nothing. In fact, I got a sleep deficit.

What *is* worth spending time on, in terms of our daily life? I suggest to you, our relationships -- with the divine, with the earth, with one another.

I remember a eulogy at a funeral of a man who died in his fifties of a brain tumour. As the disease progressed, his son testified that after several months of living with his cancer and coming closer to death, his father first lost his interest in his car and the outside world, and next, he dropped his daily routine of checking the stock market numbers. What to eat followed as a non-issue and finally, once bedridden, it was only family, their presence and stories of what was happening in their lives that brought meaning to his conversation with others. Relationships with loved ones outlasted everything else in terms of meaning.

The sayings in today’s gospel invite us to consider relationships of all kinds and *how* we receive what the earth gives, whether with an attitude of entitlement and ownership, like the fellow in the parable who has more than enough, but wants to hoard even more, or an attitude of gratitude and giving back in kind, two Indigenous principles for life.

The Wisdom Commentary on Luke’s gospel (Reid & Matthews) raises eco-theologian Anne Elvey’s point (p. 398) that Western culture’s anthropocentrism, (always putting the importance of people before everything else on earth) “is at odds with the pressing need to be reoriented to an Earth of which we are already one of many interconnected parts.” (In other words, we humans are not the ultimate or the most important). What is important is the way in which we are connected to everything else and especially for us to recognize in our actions that *interdependent* relationship with all creation.

Indigenous wisdom supports giving back, or reciprocity, and thanksgiving. These are two self-sustaining practices in our relationship with mother earth. To give back and give thanks can become essential ingredients for survival. Taking without asking, taking more than we need, and hoarding rather than sharing because of a sense of ownership or greed and little trust in God’s providential love, only lead to an imbalance which we now know as the climate crisis.

AI sums up the Ecclesiastes passage this way: “Worldly pursuits and achievements are ultimately meaningless and fleeting”. Not a new idea! This wisdom writing was written about 2300 years ago.

Our greed and entitlement in terms of accumulating wealth rather than sharing it, are characteristics of a people operating with what Elvey calls, and I quote her here again “a mentality of unlimited supply [instead of] ... an Earth-centered mindfulness” (Reid & Matthews, 398). We are mis-guided in our relationship with earth and her offerings if we are not oriented to sharing.

And the same theme comes up in the letter to the Colossians. So many ways people seek meaning with their money, whether pleasure or competition, or accumulation of goods, which, if the

end result is not gratitude, love and sharing with someone else, all that work is very likely to end up meaningless. Paul teaches us to leave behind our desires that seek self-satisfaction in life, and rather, to recognize a light and life within us and “so put on the new regalia provided for [us]—kindness, humbleness of heart, gentleness of spirit and be patient with one another.”

There is a generous nature in Christ which provides for others, which encourages us to learn from the lily and raven and seriously relate to the world around us in appreciation.

Mary Oliver’s take on this passage in her poem lilies is worth considering. Jesus has cautioned his listeners against greed and against worry about their appearance and other things. These tendencies of human behaviour, that is, to think of ourselves as more important than plants and other animals and to take more than we need, or equally so, to live out of a desire to be liked by others through our appearance -- to be someone we are not-- are, in the end, meaningless.

Lilies by Mary Oliver (please see the poem online)

http://famouspoetsandpoems.com/poets/mary_oliver/poems/15822#google_vignette)

I hope my trust in Creator will become like this hummingbird’s that I not toss and turn in the night with meaningless problems to solve. May we come to know more and more that, as Richard Bruxwoort Colligan says in the psalm, we are children of the earth and let’s let God become more and more “our sanctuary” in our concerns.

QUESTION What do you notice in the readings/liturgy? Describe a meaningful relationship of any kind in your life. What do you give; what do you receive? What do you find meaningless?