

Our Gift, Our Duty

Genesis 1: 29-31: "Then God said, 'I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground, everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food.' And it was so. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." When God created us, he gave us all dominion over the Earth. It was His gift to us and our duty to look after it. As we continue to expand our knowledge and technology, we are risking everything given to us on this Earth. We are destroying our home through dumping a countless number of plastics in the ocean, through throwing away an immense number of products and foods, through burning fossil fuels, by overusing natural resources, by destroying animal habitats, and by much more.

As stewards of God's great gift, we have let this catastrophic situation get away from us. We have thrown away so much that there is an estimated 8 million tons of plastic in the ocean. This number continues to grow everyday as we continue to pollute the oceans with our wasteful products. Some countries like Costa Rica are trying everything they can to go completely without plastic, and some organizations are trying to pick up mass amounts of plastic out of the ocean. Despite these efforts, major contributors to the ocean plastic, like China and India, have been growing instead of decreasing in their amount of plastic waste. This problem will continue to grow as long as countries neglect the Earth's warning signs and do not look for a healthy alternative to plastics.

The oceans are not the only part of Earth affected by our culture. Many people throw away much more than they need to, and they do not care or wonder where it ends up. Many rivers and streams are being destroyed by this pollution. This pollution can kill and destroy animals, plants, and habitats for many species. Landfills may seem harmless if they are not by water, but rainfall that runs through them can become polluted and end up in lakes and rivers. We never tend to think about where our garbage goes, but it is fueling the ruin of our home given to us by God.

Our polluted waterways are not the only struggle Earth has. As we continue to burn fossil fuels for electricity, we are polluting the atmosphere of our gift. The emissions from large power plants are trapping heat into the Earth causing the ice caps to melt and the ocean waters to rise. As the heat rises, areas prone to wildfires are experiencing the worst they ever have. The chemicals we release are also mixing with rain forming what is called acid rain. This acid rain is destroying plant and animal life. There are some countries and companies working hard to make clean sources of energy like wind, water, and solar power. These, however, are either not reliable enough or too expensive to use widely. As experts fix these issues, companies are continuing to release harmful chemicals into our home.

As we continue to destroy our water and our air through countless means of pollution, we are also destroying habitats for many animals through deforestation. As lumber companies

destroy trees to sell, many animals are being stripped of their habitats. Now, animals are becoming extinct at a faster rate than ever before. Trees are also very valuable because they take up carbon dioxide out of atmosphere. Since carbon dioxide contributes to the effects of global warming, trees can help slow that effect. There are many efforts to help replant trees, but once again, these efforts are outweighed by the mass amounts of deforesting that lumber companies are doing.

We see that much of what we are doing as a society is destroying our home. We are failing to do as God asked us to when He gifted us our beautiful home. We can help reverse this, and we can bring back the home that Earth used to be. We can do small things like having reusable water bottles instead of plastic ones. We can buy things that we know will last, and not buy things we know we will throw away soon. We can use old phones or devices rather than buying new ones when they first come out. We can help raise awareness and volunteer at environmental organizations. All of what we can do for our planet will come out of love and respect for our God and for our home that He gave us. If we all had that love and respect then we would never be where we are now, and we would be able to easily make it out of this crisis. As Pope Francis told us in his letter *Laudato Si*, “We must protect creation for it is a gift which the Lord has given us, it is God’s present to us; we are guardians of creation.” God entrusted us with His beautiful creation, so it is our responsibility to care for and never give up on His Earth. Loving the Lord is loving our home.