# Second Sunday of Advent Year A

I haven’t seen very much of the new series of *Planet Earth*, but the combination of detailed scientific knowledge and stunning camera work is once again enabling us to see the beautiful and rich diversity and splendor of what Pope Francis calls Our Common Home.

Inspiring as such programs are they also bring the brutal reality of life into our living rooms. Hunters and hunted are shown in vivid detail; and while we applaud dexterous escapes we are not shielded from the frenzy of killing scenes when the quarry succumb to their pursuers.

This is a far cry from the ‘Peaceable Kingdom’ presented in the vision of the Prophet Isaiah. The picture he paints bears more resemblance to a collection of cuddly toys with wolves snuggled up with lambs, panthers with kid goats, calves with lion cubs; in the midst of which a tiny child has nothing to fear from a venomous snake.

Of course the scene imagined by Isaiah echoes the harmony of the Eden in which Adam and Eve dwelt at peace with nature and ever need was provided for by God’s love without need of competition or graft.

Isaiah, like us, knew that the world we inhabit lacks such harmony, he knew also that the greatest threat to peace comes from the greed and envy of human hearts. And today, despite the overwhelming evidence, there are some who would choose to ignore the effects of such greed on the ecology of the planet. The dangers are very real and could prove to be final for the whole human race, for as Sir Stephen Hawking says: “We are quite capable of destroying the planet, but what we cannot currently do is escape it.”

Those of us who cherish the earth have our own part to play by incremental steps, reducing the footprint of our own impact and avoiding waste and excess in our day to day choices and consumption; and by supporting those who propose and implement adjustments to the economy that will reduce global warming.

The vision of Isaiah may well echo the Genesis account of Eden; but it is not some nostalgic yearning for a lost and irretrievable past. It is a rallying call worthy of John the Baptist, for us to repent, to reform our vision of the world. It is an expression of our longing for the healing of nature, the discovery of new relationships. It becomes a promise fulfilled whenever we learn in Paul’s words that hope is nurtured through trust in God, by patient perseverance in the face of disappointment, all of which is expressed through tolerance and friendship.

So, by way of encouragement for us all this Advent, I want to share another of Mary Oliver’s poems. It is called *Making the House Ready for the Lord* and it beautifully describes how the place we prepare for the coming Lord is never quite perfect and tidy, nor would he want it to be, because it is a place we share with others, including our fellow creatures:

Dear Lord, I have swept and I have washed but
still nothing is as shining as it should be
for you. Under the sink, for example, is an
uproar of mice - it is the season of their
many children. What shall I do? And under the eaves
and through the walls the squirrels
have gnawed their ragged entrances - but it is the season
when they need shelter, so what shall I do? And
the raccoon limps into the kitchen and opens the cupboard
while the dog snores, the cat hugs the pillow;
what shall I do? Beautiful is the new snow falling
in the yard and the fox who is staring boldly
up the path, to the door. And still I believe you will
come, Lord: you will, when I speak to the fox,
the sparrow, the lost dog, the shivering sea-goose, know
that really I am speaking to you whenever I say,
as I do all morning and afternoon: Come in, Come in.

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