

CREATION PRAYER SERVICE AT BRADDOCK BAY ON LAKE ONTARIO

– September 13, 2026

– Rev. David Tedesche, St Theodore's Church, Gates, NY

The Canticle of the Creatures (written by St. Francis of Assisi c. AD 1225-1226)

The Highest, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.
To You alone, The Highest, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of you, The Highest, he bears the likeness.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather through which you give sustenance to Your creatures.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night and he is beautiful
and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, The Highest, they shall be crowned.

Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those who will find Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility

Station One — The Highest, Brother Sun, Sister Moon and the Stars

**“The Highest, all powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory, the honour, and all blessing.
To You alone, The Highest, do they belong,
and no man is worthy to mention Your name.**

**Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and you give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, The Highest, he bears the likeness.**

**Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.”**

“The Highest, all powerful, good Lord”

- Francis begins not with the Earth or with human beings, but with **God**. Creation can only be understood properly when we recognize it as creation: something received from Another.
- God is “the Highest”—not merely the greatest being within the universe, but the Creator and **First Cause** upon whom every creature depends for its existence.
- God is also “good.” The God from whom creation comes is also its ultimate **Final Cause**. Creation comes from Goodness and is ordered toward goodness.
- “No man is worthy to mention Your name.” This humility goes deeper than our sinfulness. Mary was sinless and perfectly humble. St. Catherine of Siena expressed the deeper truth: **“You are He who is; I am she who is not.”**
- God possesses existence of himself. We do not. Creation is **ex nihilo—from nothing**. And yet we really exist and are really good because our existence and goodness are received from God.
- This is the beginning of ecological humility: **the world did not originate with us**. We arrived very late in a creation already filled with goodness.

“Be praised, my Lord, through all your creatures”

- Notice the plural: **creatures**. Sun, Moon and stars; air and water; rocks and trees; animals and human beings—an astonishing multiplicity of beings.
- Creation is not God. Rather, innumerable finite creatures participate, each in its own way, in the goodness of their Creator.
- No single creature can adequately represent God's infinite perfection. The tremendous **diversity of creation** manifests in many finite ways what exists perfectly and simply in God.
- The creatures praise God by being what God created them to be. Their existence, beauty, intelligibility and fruitfulness declare the glory of their Creator.
- Before creation becomes something for us to **use**, therefore, it is something for us to **receive, notice, contemplate and praise**.

“Especially Sir Brother Sun”

- Our Sun formed **4.6 billion years ago** when gravity drew together an enormous cloud of mostly hydrogen and helium. Nuclear fusion eventually began at its center. A remarkable balance between gravity pulling inward and pressure pushing outward has allowed the Sun to shine steadily for billions of years.
- Earth formed shortly afterward, about **4.54 billion years ago**, from material orbiting the young Sun.

- But the story goes back still further. The carbon in living cells, oxygen, calcium, iron and many other elements were produced through **earlier generations of stars and stellar events**. The material from which Earth and our bodies are constructed has an ancient stellar history.
- Once our solar system formed, Brother Sun became the source of energy for life at Earth's surface.
- The Sun's **gravity holds Earth in its orbit**. Its radiation warms the planet. Photosynthetic organisms capture solar energy and store it in chemical bonds. Nearly every terrestrial food web ultimately depends upon this captured sunlight.
- Solar energy also drives much of the **water cycle, weather and wind**. Even the breeze moving through the trees around us belongs to a planetary system energized largely by Brother Sun.
- “Who brings the day.” Our bodies themselves are synchronized with cycles of sunlight and darkness. Sleeping and waking, hormones, feeding, flowering, photosynthesis and animal behavior all participate in these ancient rhythms.
- We do not merely **look at** the Sun. Our lives are profoundly ordered in relation to it.

“Of You, the Highest, he bears the likeness”

- Francis does not worship the Sun. He calls him **Brother Sun**. However magnificent the Sun may be, it too is a creature beneath the same Creator.
- Yet Francis says that the Sun bears God's likeness. It gives light, communicates energy, makes other things visible, orders the rhythms of life, and sustains an extraordinary community of creatures.
- Human beings possess a unique dignity. Yet creation does not receive its goodness from us. Its goodness comes from God. Our privilege is to receive creation, understand it, cultivate it, and consciously return its praise to the Creator.
- The Sun was shining before human eyes existed to see it. Stars were forming, shining and dying billions of years before anyone contemplated their beauty.
- **The cosmic liturgy did not begin when we arrived. We have been invited to join it.**

“Sister Moon and the stars”

- At night we discover that our Sun is itself only **one star among an immense multitude**.
- Generations of stars existed before our Sun. Their long histories prepared the material from which later stars, rocky planets and eventually living creatures could arise.
- Sister Moon belongs intimately to Earth's history. It formed very early, probably following an enormous collision involving the young Earth. Its gravity produces much of Earth's tides and has influenced biological rhythms for billions of years.
- Francis calls the heavenly bodies “**clear and precious and beautiful.**” Beauty invites attention; attention awakens gratitude; and gratitude teaches us to receive the world as **gift rather than merely as resource**.

Pause — Look Up

- Look at the sky. Notice the sunlight upon the lake, trees, grass and people around you. Even if clouds hide the Sun, its energy is present throughout this landscape.
- Consider the immense history that preceded us: ancient stars forming the elements, our Sun igniting, Earth and Moon taking shape, billions of years passing before human beings stood here.
- And now we stand within that same creation. **We did not make it. We have received it.**

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **How often do I move through God's creation without really noticing it?** Can I recover the habit of looking, attending and allowing created beauty to lead me toward gratitude and praise?
- **Does the way I use my time and the things of the Earth reflect the humility of someone who receives everything as gift?** What small change might help me live less distractedly or wastefully—not from guilt, but from greater gratitude?

Station Two — Brother Wind, Air and Weather

**“Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather
through which you give sustenance to Your creatures.”**

“Through Brother Wind”

- Francis now turns from the heavens toward the world immediately surrounding us. **We cannot see the air, but we can see what it does.** Leaves move. Clouds travel. Waves rise. Birds are carried upon it. We feel the breeze against our skin.
- Wind is simply **air in motion**. Much of that movement ultimately begins with Brother Sun. The Sun heats Earth's surface unevenly; differences of temperature and pressure set the atmosphere in motion.
- Here at Lake Ontario, we can watch the relationship directly. Moving air transfers energy to the surface of the water and produces waves. Brother Wind and Sister Water are distinct creatures, yet they continually act upon one another.
- This gives us one of the central lessons of ecology: **nothing in creation exists entirely by itself**. Creatures possess their own natures and goodness, but they also exist within relationships.

“And through the air”

- Earth's atmosphere is a remarkably thin envelope surrounding the planet. Within it exists nearly the whole terrestrial world familiar to us: clouds and rain, weather and birds, forests and animals, human civilizations and every breath we have ever taken.
- The air we breathe is approximately **78% nitrogen and 21% oxygen**, with smaller quantities of argon, carbon dioxide, water vapor and other gases.
- Oxygen is so familiar that we rarely experience it as a gift. Yet every few seconds, throughout our entire lives, our bodies must reach outside themselves and receive something they do not possess.
- **To be alive is to be dependent.** We cannot seal ourselves off from creation. From our first breath after birth until our last, the boundary between “myself” and “the environment” is continually being crossed.
- Our lungs bring oxygen into intimate contact with our blood. The bloodstream carries it throughout the body, where our cells use it in the process by which energy is obtained from food.
- Much of the oxygen in today's atmosphere ultimately comes from **photosynthetic life**. Plants, algae and photosynthetic microorganisms use sunlight, water and carbon dioxide, releasing oxygen. Animals and human beings breathe oxygen and return carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.
- The exchange is not a perfect little closed circle—Earth's carbon and oxygen cycles are much more complicated—but it reveals something real: **our breathing belongs to an ecological communion much older and larger than ourselves.**

An Invisible Common Good

- Air is peculiar among the goods of creation because it is so obviously **shared**. The atmosphere does not divide itself according to property lines.
- The breath I exhale enters a common atmosphere. Smoke and pollution released in one place can travel elsewhere. The quality of the air therefore reminds us that creation is not merely a collection of private possessions.
- Catholic Social Teaching speaks of the **common good**: conditions of life that allow persons and communities to flourish. Clean air is one of the clearest physical examples. It is a good we receive together and must protect together.

- Pope Francis' idea of **integral ecology** begins with precisely this recognition of relationship. Human welfare and environmental welfare cannot finally be separated. What enters the atmosphere eventually enters lungs, forests, waters and soils.

“Cloudy and serene”

- Francis praises God not only for pleasant weather. He explicitly mentions the atmosphere when it is **cloudy** as well as **serene**—in its changing conditions.
- Weather is not merely decoration surrounding life. It is one of the great systems through which Earth continually redistributes **energy and water**.
- Water evaporates from lakes, oceans and land; plants release water vapor; atmospheric currents carry moisture; vapor condenses into clouds; precipitation returns water to Earth. The atmosphere has been described as a kind of global transport system for water.
- Thus Brother Sun, Brother Wind and Sister Water already form an interconnected community: **sunlight supplies energy; air moves; water evaporates; clouds form; rain falls; plants grow; creatures are sustained**.
- The categories in Francis's poem are therefore not isolated compartments. Each new creature leads us toward the others.

“Every kind of weather through which you give sustenance”

- Not every individual weather event is pleasant or harmless. He recognizes something larger: the changing atmosphere belongs to the created order **through which life as a whole is sustained**.
- Rain replenishes soil, streams, wetlands and lakes. Wind transports heat and moisture, disperses pollen and seeds, carries migrating creatures, shapes shorelines and drives waves. Weather connects distant parts of the Earth.
- The peaceful breeze we feel today and a powerful Lake Ontario storm belong to the same physical order.
- This will matter when we consider the restoration of Braddock Bay. **The wind and waves were not evil**. The difficulty arose when the protective barrier deteriorated and powerful waves could act directly upon a vulnerable marsh.
- Ecological restoration therefore did not mean defeating Brother Wind or Sister Water. It meant **restoring a damaged relationship** so that lake, waves, barrier and wetland could once again coexist fruitfully.

Pause — Breathe and Listen

- Become conscious for a moment of something you have been doing since this meditation began: **breathing**.
- Take one ordinary breath. The air entering your lungs was not manufactured by you, earned by you or stored within you. You simply receive it.
- Feel the breeze if it is present. Watch the leaves and the surface of the lake. Notice the clouds—or the clear sky in which clouds might form.
- Creation is not simply a collection of objects placed around us. It is an **order of relationships in which we ourselves participate**.
- Brother Wind teaches a quiet form of humility: **I live by receiving what I cannot provide for myself**.

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **How conscious am I of my dependence upon gifts I normally take for granted—air, water, sunlight, plants, soil and the labor of other people?** Can greater awareness of dependence make me more grateful rather than more anxious?
- **Do my choices reflect the fact that I live within a world shared with others?** Is there one small way I can consume, travel, discard or use energy more thoughtfully—not from fear or guilt, but from gratitude for a common home entrusted to us?

Station Three — Sister Water

**“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,
which is very useful and humble
and precious and chaste.”**

“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water”

- Water is very ordinary. It falls from the sky, runs through the ground, fills lakes and rivers, enters plants and animals, circulates through our bodies, and returns again to the environment.
- Yet **liquid water is indispensable to every form of life known to us**. The chemistry of the living cell takes place in water. It dissolves and transports nutrients and wastes, participates in chemical reactions, carries substances through blood and plant tissues, and helps organisms regulate temperature.
- Sister Water is not merely something outside us that we drink. **She is already within us.**

The Great Lakes — An Extraordinary Gift

- The water before us belongs to one of the most remarkable freshwater systems on Earth. The five Great Lakes contain about **21% of the world's fresh water and 84% of North America's fresh water**.
- We therefore live beside a planetary treasure. What is ordinary to us because we see it frequently is extraordinary when viewed from the perspective of the whole Earth.
- The Great Lakes themselves are relatively young. During the Ice Age, enormous ice sheets—at times around a mile thick—repeatedly advanced and retreated across this region, scouring and deepening older valleys and basins.
- As the climate warmed after the last glacial maximum, the ice retreated and enormous quantities of meltwater filled the basins. The lakes changed shape repeatedly as the ice withdrew, outlets shifted and the land slowly rebounded from the tremendous weight of the glaciers. They reached approximately their present shapes and sizes only within the last several thousand years.
- Even the **sand beneath our feet** belongs to this history of movement: rock broken, ground, transported and sorted by ice, water, waves and currents. A beach is not simply a border between land and water. It is a place continually shaped by their encounter.

Fresh Water on a Salty Planet

- About **97% of Earth's water is saline**. The enormous body of fresh water before us is thus a rare gift.
- Why are the oceans salty while Lake Ontario is fresh? Rainwater slowly weathers rock, dissolving tiny quantities of minerals and salts. Rivers carry these materials downstream. Over immense periods of time the oceans receive them, while evaporation removes almost pure water and leaves the salts behind.
- The Great Lakes also receive dissolved minerals, but unlike closed salty lakes they are continually **flushed by incoming and outgoing water**. Lake Ontario receives water from the other Great Lakes through the Niagara River and sends water onward through the St. Lawrence River toward the Atlantic.
- Thus Sister Water connects us to places far beyond what we can see. The water before us belongs to a system stretching from the interior of North America to the Atlantic Ocean.

“Very useful”

- Water is **useful**. There is no embarrassment in saying so. Creation really does serve human life.
- Lake Ontario is not merely beautiful scenery. Its water sustains cities, farms, industries, wildlife and ecosystems on both sides of the international border. **Nine million people drink from Lake Ontario.**
- Water teaches us something about the Catholic idea of the **common good**. No one person created Lake Ontario. No generation can claim it entirely for itself. We receive it from those who came before us and hold it in trust for those who will come afterward.
- To protect water from pollution is an act of **intergenerational justice, solidarity and love of neighbor**.

“Humble and precious”

- Francis joins two words that seem almost contradictory: **humble and precious**.
- Water is humble. It naturally flows downward. It seeks the lowest places. It yields when we put our hands through it. It takes the shape of what receives it.
- Yet this lowly substance carves valleys, moves stone, fills the Great Lakes, shapes shorelines and sustains forests, animals and civilizations. It is powerful.
- So also, **humility is not uselessness or weakness**. The humble creature receives its place within an order larger than itself—and precisely there becomes extraordinarily influential and fruitful.
- Water is precious—it serves so quietly that we can forget how impossible life would be without it.

“And chaste”

- Francis's word **“chaste”** can first suggest water's purity and clarity: clean water is transparent. It does not call attention to itself; it allows light to pass through it and makes other things visible.
- Christian chastity likewise means more than restraint. It is purity. It is an **integration of the person**, in which desire is ordered to the true good of the person rather than obscuring that good.
- Perhaps Sister Water can therefore become an image for interior purity: when our desires are rightly ordered, we become more capable of **seeing things as they truly are**—God as God, another person as a person, and creation as gift rather than merely as something to possess.
- Pollution makes water opaque and unable to communicate its natural purity. Disordered desire can do something analogous within us: it makes the good harder to see.

Water Raised to a Sacrament

- Christianity takes this humble creature and places it at the doorway of supernatural life.
- In **Baptism**, God does not discard the material world in order to communicate grace. Christ takes ordinary water—something already associated with cleansing, life and birth—and makes it the sacramental sign through which we are reborn “of water and Spirit.”
- The water of Baptism remains real water, but through Christ it becomes an instrument of something nature by itself could never accomplish: **our incorporation into Christ and participation in divine life**.
- Creation therefore prepares us for sacrament. The same God who speaks through Sister Water in creation chooses water as a means through which Christ acts in the order of grace.

Pause — Look at the Water

- Look across Lake Ontario. Try for a moment to see it not merely as familiar scenery but as something **rare and precious on the scale of our planet**.
- Listen to the waves. Notice the sand beneath your feet and the water meeting the shore. Think of glaciers, rain and rivers; of plants and fish; of millions of people opening a faucet; of the water within your own body; and of the water once poured over you in Baptism.
- **One humble creature passes through geology, ecology, human community and sacrament.**

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **Have familiarity and abundance made me forget how precious water is?** Can I learn to receive even an ordinary glass of water with greater gratitude—and use water with the reverence appropriate to a gift shared with other creatures, neighbors and future generations?
- **What in me needs greater clarity and purity?** Are there desires, habits, possessions or distractions that make it harder for me to see God, other people, or creation as they truly are? Like Sister Water, can I become more transparent to the light I have received?

Station Four — Brother Fire

**“Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night
and he is beautiful and playful
and robust and strong.”**

“Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire”

- Fire is different from the other creatures praised so far. Air and water are substances; **fire is a process**—matter undergoing rapid chemical transformation and releasing stored energy as heat and light.
- Yet perhaps this makes Brother Fire especially appropriate for contemplating **energy**: the power by which things move, change, grow, warm, illuminate and act upon one another.
- Look at the quiet landscape around us. It may appear still, but it is filled with activity. Sunlight falls upon leaves. Plants carry out photosynthesis. Water moves through roots and stems. Cells perform countless chemical reactions. Wind moves branches. Waves strike the distant shore. **Creation is always acting.**

The Energy Hidden in Creation

- We encountered the great source of Earth's surface energy when we contemplated Brother Sun. Nuclear fusion within the Sun releases enormous quantities of energy, a tiny fraction of which reaches Earth.
- Plants capture some of that energy in sunlight through **photosynthesis**, storing solar energy in chemical bonds. That stored energy then passes through ecosystems as organisms eat plants and one another.
- When we eat, our bodies break down energy-rich molecules through cellular respiration. We are not literally “burning” food with a flame, but chemically there is a family resemblance: stored chemical energy is being released in a controlled way and made available for life.
- The muscles carrying us are working because our cells are continually transforming chemical energy.
- Even wood contains stored solar energy. A tree grows by capturing sunlight and building carbon-rich molecules. When dry wood burns, some of that stored chemical energy is rapidly released.
- Brother Sun, therefore, is connected with Brother Fire. **Energy is received, transformed, stored, released and passed onward.**

“Beautiful and playful”

- Fire dances. It changes shape from moment to moment. It illuminates darkness, warms the cold, cooks food and gathers people together.
- Human beings learned very early to cooperate with fire. Controlled fire extended the day, provided warmth and protection, transformed food and materials, and eventually helped make possible metallurgy, industry and modern civilization.
- There is something profoundly human about this. We do not merely receive the powers of creation passively. Through **reason, skill and work**, we discover them and learn to direct them.
- Catholic stewardship does not require us to leave creation untouched. Human creativity itself belongs to creation. Science, engineering and technology can be genuine expressions of our vocation to **cultivate and care for the Earth.**

“Robust and strong”

- But Francis immediately adds another truth. Fire is not merely beautiful and playful. It is **strong**.
- The same fire that warms a house can destroy it. The same human intelligence that discovers new sources of energy can use them to build communities—or weapons.
- Modern civilization commands quantities of energy that previous generations could scarcely have imagined. Electricity, engines, fossil fuels, nuclear energy and renewable sources allow us to heat buildings, transport food, cross continents, communicate globally and perform work on a huge scale.

- Energy has also become a source of **wealth, competition and conflict**. Nations seek secure supplies of oil, natural gas, electricity and other resources.
- Brother Fire therefore raises a moral question: **What will we do with this power?**

Energy and Our Common Home

- The enormous expansion of human energy use has brought genuine goods: longer lives, medicine, transportation, food production, communication and relief from exhausting forms of labor.
- It has also produced environmental costs. Burning fossil fuels releases carbon dioxide that had been stored underground into the atmosphere. The resulting increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases is one factor changing Earth's climate.
- But the Christian question is larger than any single environmental controversy. It concerns our relationship with **power, consumption and limits**.
- Pope Francis warns in *Laudato Si'* against the **"technocratic paradigm"**: the temptation to assume that every problem caused by the exercise of power can be solved by acquiring more technological power.
- Technology is necessary, but it cannot tell us **how much is enough, what sacrifices are just, what should be preserved, or what kind of people we ought to become**.
- No machine can produce gratitude. No new energy source can manufacture temperance. No engineering project can substitute for justice, solidarity or love.

An Ecological Conversion of Desire

- This is why care for creation ultimately requires more than technical solutions. It requires **conversion**.
- Christian asceticism has always taught that freedom does not mean satisfying every desire simply because we can do so. Sometimes freedom means discovering that we can joyfully live with **less**.
- Conserving energy, avoiding needless consumption, repairing rather than immediately replacing, sharing resources and resisting waste can therefore become more than environmental techniques. They can become exercises in the Christian virtue of **temperance**.
- The goal is not a fearful or joyless life. Francis himself calls Brother Fire **beautiful and playful**. Christian restraint exists so that created goods can be enjoyed gratefully rather than consumed compulsively.
- The deepest ecological question may therefore not be simply, **"What new technology will save us?"** but also, **"What kind of people must we become?"**

Pause — Notice the Energy Around You

- Look at the trees and shrubs surrounding us. They are quietly receiving sunlight and building living tissue from water, carbon dioxide and minerals.
- Notice your own body. Your heart is beating; muscles are maintaining your posture; cells are transforming energy even while you stand still.
- Listen for the waves beyond the trees. Their movement contains energy transferred through wind and water. At Braddock Bay, that energy became powerful enough to erode a vulnerable marsh when its protective barrier disappeared.
- **Energy is everywhere: beautiful, powerful—and therefore something to receive with wisdom.**

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **How do I use the power placed in my hands—energy, technology, money, possessions and time?** Do these gifts make me more grateful and generous, or do they sometimes encourage me to expect that every desire should immediately be satisfied?
- **Where might God be inviting me to discover the freedom of "enough"?** Is there one small form of waste, unnecessary consumption or habitual convenience that I could surrender—not out of fear, but as an act of gratitude, temperance and solidarity?

Station Five — Sister Mother Earth

**“Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains us and governs us and who produces
varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.”**

“Sister Mother Earth”

- We have contemplated the heavens, air, water and energy. All of these meet beneath us: **Earth**.
- Francis calls her both **Sister** and **Mother**. She is Sister because the Earth, like us, is a creature of God. She is Mother because bodily life continually comes forth from her and is sustained by her.
- Nearly everything we eat ultimately comes from the Earth. The minerals within our bodies have passed through soil, water, plants, animals and countless earlier living things.
- The material of our bodies belongs to the Earth and will eventually return to it.
- Yet the ground beneath us is not simply dead matter waiting for human beings to make it useful. **Healthy soil is one of the most complex ecosystems on Earth.**

How Earth Becomes Soil

- The story begins with rock. Heat and cold, freezing water, wind, rain and chemical reactions slowly break and alter rock into smaller particles and new minerals.
- But **soil is more than weathered rock**. Mature soil develops through the interaction of minerals with water, air and living organisms.
- Microorganisms alter minerals, decompose dead organisms and release nutrients. Fungi extend threadlike networks through the soil. Roots penetrate and stabilize it. Insects, worms and other animals continually move and restructure it.
- Fallen leaves and dead organisms are broken down and incorporated into organic matter. **What has died becomes part of the conditions from which new life grows.**
- A handful of healthy soil can contain **billions of microorganisms**. Soil is not literally one living organism, but it is so thoroughly structured by living relationships that it can almost appear **alive as a community**.

The First Living Earth

- For most of Earth's history, there were no forests, flowers, birds or mammals. The earliest life we know was **microbial**, appearing at least 3.5 billion years ago.
- For billions of years microorganisms dominated life on Earth. Some eventually developed forms of photosynthesis that released oxygen, helping transform the atmosphere and prepare conditions in which more complex life could flourish.
- Life never left the microbial world behind. **Every plant and animal still lives in relationship with microorganisms.**

The Invisible Community Within Us

- Trillions of microorganisms live on our skin and within our digestive tract. Many are not enemies. Our normal microbiota help digest food, produce useful compounds, compete against pathogens and participate in regulating our **immune system**.
- Modern sanitation, antibiotics and disinfectants have saved innumerable lives, and dangerous microbes must sometimes be destroyed. But a “scorched earth” mentality misunderstands ecology. **The goal is not the absence of microorganisms, but a healthy community of them.**
- The same is true of agriculture. Healthy soils depend upon microbial and fungal communities that decompose organic material, cycle nutrients, interact with roots and maintain soil structure.
- Good stewardship therefore asks not simply, **“How do we eliminate what we do not want?”** but also, **“What relationships must be protected so that the whole can flourish?”**

“Who sustains us and governs us”

- Francis makes an arresting claim: Mother Earth not only **sustains** us but in some sense **governs** us.
- We manipulate the Earth, but we do not write its fundamental laws. Seeds germinate according to their natures. Roots seek water and nutrients. Microorganisms metabolize. Seasons constrain agriculture.
- Nature therefore places **limits** upon us. Those limits are not necessarily enemies of human freedom. They can teach us how to exercise freedom wisely.
- The farmer does not create the power by which a seed becomes a plant. He prepares soil, supplies water, removes obstacles and **cooperates with powers already present within living things**.

“Varied fruits”

- Fruit is beautiful and nourishing to us, but biologically it also serves the plant's **reproduction**.
- The colors, sugars and nutrients of fruit can attract animals, which eat it and carry its seeds elsewhere.
- **Plant feeds animal; animal disperses seed; seed gives rise to another plant.**
- Creation reminds us that something can be **for us without existing only for us**.

“With colored flowers and herbs”

- The colors of flowers are not random decoration. Many flowering plants reproduce by attracting bees, butterflies, moths, birds and other animals that carry pollen between flowers.
- Color, shape, fragrance and nectar function as **signals**. Some flowers even display ultraviolet patterns invisible to human eyes that help guide insects toward nectar and pollen.
- We see beauty. A bee sees information. The plant reproduces. The pollinator receives nourishment. **One flower participates in several relationships at once.**
- Francis therefore praises not simply “plants,” but **“varied fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.”** Creation's abundance appears not in monotonous sameness but in ordered diversity.

The Ecology of Gift

- The word **ecology** comes from the Greek *oikos*—“house” or “household.” An ecosystem is a household of relationships.
- Soil makes this especially visible. Rock, water, air, sunlight, microbes, fungi, roots, insects, animals and decomposition all participate in producing the fertile ground from which terrestrial life grows.
- Human beings belong within this household. We can cultivate it intelligently and sometimes must intervene to protect it. But we cannot flourish by destroying the relationships upon which we depend.
- Sister Mother Earth therefore teaches a paradox: **we exercise genuine dominion, but we remain dependent creatures.**

Pause — Look Down and Around

- Look at the ground beneath your feet. What appears simply as “dirt” is the result of geology, weather, water and generations of living organisms acting over time.
- Look at the shrubs, grasses and trees. Beneath them, roots interact with fungi and microorganisms. Above them, leaves receive sunlight and exchange gases. Insects and birds move among them.
- **The landscape is a community of relationships, most of which we cannot see.**
- And from this community come the food, oxygen, medicine, wood, fibers, and beauty that sustain us.

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **Do I see the Earth as a community of creatures and relationships, or mostly as background scenery and raw material?** Can I learn to notice the hidden life beneath my feet with greater wonder?
- **Where am I tempted toward a “scorched earth” approach—eliminating, consuming or controlling rather than understanding relationships?** Can I cultivate something instead: a garden, native flowers, healthier soil, or simply a deeper habit of attention to the living world around me?

Station Six — Forgiveness, Sister Bodily Death, and Restoration

**“Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love,
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, The Highest, they shall be crowned.**

**Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no living man can escape.**

**Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those who will find Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.**

**Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.”**

“Those who give pardon for Your love”

- Brother Sun shines. Sister Water flows. Mother Earth produces her fruits. These creatures praise God simply by exercising the powers God has given them.
- But we possess **freedom**. We are capable of a new kind of praise: knowing the good and choosing it.
- Francis singles out something remarkable: **forgiveness**. A human being who has been injured can refuse retaliation, pardon another “for Your love,” and interrupt the cycle by which one evil produces another.
- The ecology of the human world therefore matters too. A common home is not healthy merely because of healthy water and forests. Human beings must learn to live together in **justice, mercy and peace**.

“And bear infirmity and tribulation”

- The sick, elderly, disabled, poor and afflicted are not useless members of the human community. Indeed, their vulnerability reveals something true about all of us: **we are dependent creatures**.
- A society that protects only the strong has misunderstood both humanity and ecology. Creation itself has taught us today that flourishing depends upon relationships of receiving and giving.
- To care for our common home therefore includes keeping it a home for **those whose voices are weakest and whose burdens are greatest**.

“Blessed are those who endure in peace”

- Christian peace is not the absence of difficulty. It is a way of remaining rightly ordered toward God, neighbor and creation even amid suffering.
- We cannot control everything that happens to us. We can choose how we respond.
- Here the Canticle begins moving beyond the natural order. Francis speaks of suffering endured **for God's love**, of a crown promised by God, and soon of mortal sin and the “second death.”
- Nature has taught us much. But **revelation speaks of something nature alone cannot tell us**.

“Our Sister Bodily Death”

- Every living thing we have contemplated today is mortal. Plants, animals, microorganisms and human bodies belong to an earthly order of **generation and corruption**.
- Living things rightly struggle to remain alive. Life is good. Yet death and decomposition also belong to the natural cycling of matter through the community of life.

- Microorganisms and fungi break down what has died. Nutrients return to soil and water. Plants take them up. Other creatures feed upon the plants. **What belonged to one living body enters the conditions from which other life can grow.**
- We are not spectators standing outside nature. We come from the Earth and one day will return to her.

From Nature to Grace

- Yet Francis does not stop with natural cycles. He distinguishes **bodily death** from the “second death.”
- Brother Sun can suggest God's radiance. Sister Water can teach humility and purity. Mother Earth can teach dependence and fecundity. But nature cannot reveal the Trinity, the Incarnation, the forgiveness of sins, or the resurrection of the dead. **For these, God must speak.**
- Grace does not abolish nature; it **elevates and perfects it**. Our naturally mortal bodies are promised something they could never achieve through their own powers: resurrection and incorruptibility.
- “This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”
- We therefore need neither deny death nor make biological survival our highest good. We can love life, care for it, and finally surrender it in the hope of resurrection.

Look Across the Water — Braddock Bay

- Now look toward the barrier protecting Braddock Bay. What stands before us is the result of a remarkable act of **restoration**.
- As the old protective barrier deteriorated, Lake Ontario's waves penetrated the bay, marshland eroded and habitats declined. Beginning in 2016, a partnership of public agencies reconstructed a roughly **1,700-foot protective barrier**, while other work reopened channels, managed invasive vegetation and restored wetland habitat.
- Notice what human beings did **not** do. They did not create the marsh's power to grow. They did not invent fish, birds, microorganisms or plants.
- Instead, human intelligence studied a damaged system and helped restore the **relationships** in which those creatures could flourish. **We did not give the marsh its life; we helped give it room to live again.**

Our Part in the Work of Restoration

- No single person could have restored Braddock Bay. Its recovery required scientists, engineers, government agencies and communities working together over many years.
- Environmental problems can make individuals feel powerless. But the answer to powerlessness is not despair. It is **solidarity**.
- We do not have to repair the whole Earth ourselves. We can ask: **What small portion of the common home has been entrusted to me?**
- Perhaps our part is modest: wasting less, caring for a garden, protecting a habitat, supporting a community project, teaching children to love creation. Small acts joined to the work of others can become something much larger. **The restored landscape before us is evidence of that.**

Final Pause — Receive and Give Thanks

- Look once more at the lake, the shoreline, the living creatures and the restored barrier.
- Much of what surrounds us existed before we arrived and, God willing, will remain after we are gone.
- **What we have received as gift, may we learn to hand on as gift.**

Ecological Conversion — Questions for Prayer

- **What small portion of God's creation and human family has actually been entrusted to me?** Where might I participate in reconciliation, care or restoration rather than indifference?
- **Sister Bodily Death reminds me that my time is limited. How do I want to use the time I have been given—and what kind of world do I hope to hand on to those who come after me?**