

Good morning. My name is Jim Engler. I go by the nickname, "Strad." Among other things, I'm a member of St. Ignatius' Green Team. Fr. Joe has invited me to share some reflections on today's readings.

This is the last Sunday of the Season of Creation. This year, the theme is: A home for all? Renewing the Oikos of God.

Oikos, in ancient Greek, describes a house or household. It is the root of ecology - study of the household; and economy - management of the household. While these two subjects seem to be in tension in today's world, they both draw us into the idea that we inhabit a home, the Earth, that needs to be appreciated and tended.

Renewing the Oikos of God could be restated as, Renewing the home of God. Heard this way, it raises the question, "What is the home of God?" And how can we be expected to remodel God's home? Actually, today's readings give us some clues. In the Gospel, Jesus has a pop quiz. Let's look for the clues and see how we do on the quiz.

The first clue is in the first reading. It helps us better understand the ecology of God's home. "So the Lord God formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air ..." This is the same ground that earlier in chapter 2 of Genesis was used to form Adam: "So the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground, breathed life into his lungs, and the man became a living being."

But this clue doesn't stand on its own. We need to remember the first human creation story. Gen 1:26 says, "So God created humanity in his own image; in his own image, God created them..." Does this imply that the earth, infused by the breath of the Spirit, is the image of God? Teilhard de Chardin has suggested that the Creation process described in Genesis was in fact the first Incarnation. God is in the earth. The earth is in us. We and all of Creation are God's home.

The next clue helps us better understand the economy of God's home. Today's Genesis reading tells a literal story of woman coming from man and their intimate relationship. But it is also a representation of the intimate relationship we have with one another. All of humanity is from one origin. All humans are part of the same household. We are bound to be faithful in our care for one another.

These creation story relationships are reinforced in the second reading. It says, with a slight rearrangement, "...all things exist for Jesus and through Jesus..." And, "He who consecrates [that is, Jesus] and those who are being consecrated all have one origin." We can call Jesus "brother" because He is of the earth, just like we are.

So we see that God's home is not just a dwelling place. It's a place where all live in loving, faithful relationship. Our call for renewal of God's home is then a call for renewing relationships with both the earth and each other.

To understand what renewal looks like, we get another clue in the Responsorial Psalm. The psalm twice says we will be blessed if we Fear the Lord. This gift of the Holy Spirit has nothing to do with fear as we normally understand it. It's more like awe and wonder. From this perspective, it describes a relationship where we see in God's creation an expression of love that is jaw dropping. Who could believe that God did this for us? With this view, how could we not want to "walk in his ways"? And those who do, will see the fruits of their labor: peace, blessings, prosperity, our children's children.

The Gospel story gives a model of how to practice Fear of the Lord: be like children. Children have an innate sense of awe and wonder. They see things for the first time with enthusiasm that we adults have long lost. Fear of the Lord comes naturally to them.

The Gospel also gives an example of what it means to “walk in his ways.” Jesus says, “Let the children come to me; do not prevent them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these.” Two thousand years ago, children didn’t have much status. They are like the poor and marginalized of our own time: ignored, no power, struggling to get by. Jesus uses the children as a stand-in. The poor, those in trouble, the dispossessed are going to show up, whether we want them to or not. How we respond is a sign of our relationship with creation. Do we hear the cry of the poor? Do we hear the cry of the earth?

And that’s the pop quiz. Do we Fear the Lord? Do we walk in his ways? Do we have a sense of awe and wonder as we look at the miracle of God, with us in creation? Are we faithful in our relationships to nature and to each other? What are we learning about our relationships from the pandemic? From George Floyd and so many outcasts whose lives don’t matter? From extreme weather that is becoming the new normal? Are we being faithful not only to our own children, but to all children in generations to come? Will our legacy be a home for all? If not, what are we doing to renew those relationships and better manage the house?

Even though there seem to be lot of challenging signs, there is opportunity. As we close the Season of Creation, Pope Francis, through the Vatican’s Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, is preparing to release the *Laudato Si’* Action Platform. This outlines a call to action for parishes and other organizations to begin a seven-year journey of renewal and growth. We are all being invited to join the journey to sustainability - to renew the Oikos of God and make it a home for all. I’m looking forward to seeing our parish’s response to this invitation.