



Franciscan Action Network

Transforming the World in the Spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare

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A Prayer Service of Reparation and Restoration

THE EARTH IS THE LORD'S.



The catastrophe in the seabed of the Gulf of Mexico that is now engulfing the shoreline of three states has created a national state of bewilderment, anger and despair. For those living in close proximity to this man-made disaster, the sense of loss and exasperation is acute. As the toxic soup of oil and chemical dispersants makes its way into marsh areas, nesting islands, into oyster and shrimp beds, and along commercial and recreational shorelines, the measure of the catastrophe grows accordingly. Rapidly accumulating bags of filthy oil-soaked booms add to the images of a disaster that has unfolded like a slow-motion nightmare over the past month.

Not unexpectedly, political pressure—like the gas and oil pressure that blew the Deep Water Horizon drilling platform on April 20th—mounts daily. Finger pointing, determining “who’s in charge?”, BP testimonials of “what we’re doing”, expectations

of criminal investigations, and calls for “safety considerations” and more regulation on drilling and leasing are par for the course. In the meantime, crude oil bleeding into the Gulf at an unknown rate remains immune to industrial tourniquets. “Clean up” efforts multiply accordingly.

Public concern over the Gulf of Mexico catastrophe has, to date, focused almost exclusively on practical and technical issues—how to stop the leakage, how to protect the shoreline, how to clean up the mess. Ominous concerns over the long-term ecological and economic impact are also mounting. Without implying moral parity, it is noteworthy that this ecological disaster is yet another in which humans and wildlife suffer together—a reality that ought to give pause to a deeper consideration of our concepts of solidarity and community.

Lost in much of the discussion and outrage over “the event” in the Gulf of Mexico is what this means for people of faith: What is an appropriate religious response to the inferno of the Deep Water Horizon rig and the oily devastation released by it?

For the oil workers who lost their lives and for their families, for those whose livelihoods have been decimated, for those working to stop the flow, and for those immediately involved in the clean up efforts, the response is obvious: prayer, concern and support. But what of the deeper faith implications of the disaster—beyond expressions of solidarity and the economic, political, scientific, technological, and legal issues that dominate the evening news? As people of faith, we gather today

in a spirit of prayer, repentance, and hope to address this issue. We do so in the following terms:

First, we acknowledge our own culpability in what has happened. The Gulf disaster is not an entirely unanticipated event. Human error and corporate irresponsibility notwithstanding, what is occurring is a consequence of our insatiable drive for oil. Deep sea drilling is a collective form of “risky behavior.” It arises on the “demand side” from expectations surrounding our standard of living, and from patterns of excessive consumption that feed an inordinate demand for carbon based cheap energy. By every turn of the ignition in our automobiles, we are implicated in the flow of crude gushing into the Gulf—even as we are also painfully reminded by the consequences of that flow of the interconnectedness of all life.

We also acknowledge that nowhere in our faith tradition are we given *absolute* sovereignty over the gift of creation. We are called to stewardship, to “cultivate” and to “keep” (protect) creation (Genesis 2:15), not to rapaciously exploit it, nor to take risks with it, the consequences of which are entirely out of proportion to short-term benefits. As stewards of creation, we are called to protect nature’s integrity and dignity, to be guardians of its gifts, to maintain a “right relationship” with it, and to live in ways that honor and respect its complex web of interconnectedness.

Second, as people of faith we again proclaim creation as the primary form of revelation. All of creation is charged with Divine Energy. All of creation mediates

the Divine mystery. All of creation is an ongoing form of prayer. To damage and degrade creation is to damage and degrade our relationship with the Divine.

Water, in particular, gives us birth and life, hope and renewal. It refreshes our body and spirit. It is metaphorically rich in our theological and religious imagination (Think: Jesus as “living water.” John 4:10-11). The pollution of water and its multiple environs strikes at the sacramental capacity of these natural mediums to nurture and enrich such thinking.

Third, as people of faith, we recognize our prophetic responsibility to continue to proclaim the sacredness of creation. This is a unique and necessary proclamation that religious communities bring to the whole of the modern ecological awakening. This is why we must not allow “the event” in the Gulf to remain framed exclusively in the secular language of an economic or industrial problem. We must not, as Pope Benedict XVI recently warned, allow nature to be viewed from a purely materialistic perspective.

In addition, we also recognize that our prophetic responsibility regarding the sacredness of creation necessitates public advocacy, along with the willingness to address the underlying cultural codes and assumptions driving our excessive consumptiveness and dependency on fossil fuels. If we are to step gently, live simply, and walk lightly on the earth, these issues must be named and engaged from the depths of our faith convictions.

Fourth, as people of faith, we are called to participate in the liberation and healing of the earth and of ourselves. The Gulf disaster presents dramatic challenges in this regard. These challenges include concrete initiatives to help the *entire* community of life most directly affected, and to work in the days ahead—as each of us can in our individual and collective circumstances—for the restoration of what has been damaged and degraded. They also include the need for a deep rethinking of our own use of natural resources.

Finally, as people of faith, we acknowledge in the face of “the event” in the Gulf that we are called once again by the pain of the earth community, and by the scope of the ecological destruction caused by human error, greed and consumptiveness, to what Pope John Paul II called an “ecological conversion.” This conversion involves much more than an “adjustment” of attitudes or the changing of light bulbs. It necessitates a transformation of consciousness impacting our relationship with the earth community as a whole, with one another, and with our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. The current tragedy in the Gulf of Mexico illustrates in a dramatic and unambiguous way how imperative this call to “ecological conversion” has once again become.

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May 28, 2010