

A Kingdom That Extends to All of God's Creation

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You are indeed Holy, O Lord,
and all you have created
rightly gives you praise,
for through your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
by the power and working of the Holy Spirit,
you give life to all things and make them holy,
and you never cease to gather a people to yourself,
so that from the rising of the sun to its setting
a pure sacrifice may be offered to your name.
—Excerpt from Eucharistic Prayer III

My priestly ministry normally does not involve much heavy lifting. However, the weight of the world bears down on me as I stand at the altar of God opening up my chest, exposing my heart, and lifting up my arms and hands in prayer on behalf of every person and nation. Praying these words of Eucharistic Prayer III becomes a spiritual workout. As I pray, I continue to expand my understanding of the Church's prayer in the specific setting where I pray at the altar of the Eucharist. All creation belongs to God. This awareness expands my consciousness and becomes the weight of prayer at the altar. As I let go of control and defenses, I bear the weight of human suffering, hunger, poverty, division, and hardship in the mystery of Jesus' passion, death, and Resurrection.

Praying the words of Eucharistic Prayer III on behalf of the assembly, I keep the suffering and pain of the world within my heart. In our common prayer, I feel the burden of sin, division, and violence in my open arms and hands. The celebration of the Eucharist is a time of expanding our belief that all of God's creation cries out for healing, wholeness, and the love that only Christ Jesus can offer. These words of Eucharistic Prayer III make it obvious that we are to be open to all people. We pray, "you never cease to gather a people to yourself." The people who are gathered in this assembly are among those people. The people we see in the streets and the stores also are included among those God gathers. The people whose stances and opinions differ from ours are among those God gathers. It is not only those who give God praise, for through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, God has given life to all things and made them holy.



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In Eucharistic Prayer III, we acknowledge that God makes all creation holy.

THE INCLUSIVE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

These few lines from Eucharistic Prayer III invite us to consider that the Kingdom of God on earth is far broader and more inclusive than our imagining. We pray at the altar with profound humility as part of God's action of faithfulness and love in our world. In other words, the Kingdom of God is far greater than

our narrow understanding of the liturgy and, most especially, our view of the redeeming work of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

The readings from Matthew's account of the Gospel during these months of September and October reveal this inclusive nature of the Kingdom of God. These sacred texts help stretch our arms and imaginations in prayer about the faithfulness of God's actions. Beginning on the Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time, Matthew's text invites us to take up our cross and be part of God's plan of redemption. In faith, we can stand together in humility with a new consciousness of God's work within our sin and division.

The Sunday Gospel readings in the next weeks invite us into a Kingdom-oriented forgiveness that unites all of creation. This forgiveness helps us to break down the walls of our ideas of salvation so that God's redeeming activity takes place within our world. We forgive multiple times, more than seven times seven. In the Gospel on the Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Jesus commands that we are to forgive our brother from the heart. This God-given ability to forgive is the healing balm that unites us. Forgiveness is radical even in our day. Power and control in our human work is still a tasty morsel that we think sweetens our lives. However, our power plays and greed naturally turn sour. Forgiveness is the work of the Holy Spirit to break down the barriers we assume should always exist among people of various languages, skin colors, economic statuses, and educational backgrounds.

EQUAL, NO MATTER OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

Matthew's Gospel account reminds us during this season that we are equal as workers in the Kingdom of Heaven. On the Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time, we hear how stubborn we can become when at first we agree to work for the Kingdom and then become too lazy to put love into justice or hope into the depth of despair. We hear that those who are shunned, such as prostitutes and tax collectors, will enter the Kingdom of God before those whose status is upheld. Today's people who are overlooked help me raise my arms in prayer during the Eucharistic Prayer. All people need God in their lives. I want to be counted among those Jesus comforts and invites.

Through his recounting of the parable of the wedding banquet (Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time), Matthew affirms the Kingdom of hope. He tells us that some people still ignore the invitation to the heavenly banquet and some run off in the opposite direction when invited. All are invited to the feast. This inclusive invitation may frighten since it means that people unlike ourselves are invited. Matthew addresses those who want to know exactly what needs to be done to enter the Kingdom. In the reading on the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, the evangelist gets to the heart of the Commandments. Loving God with our entire mind, heart, and soul and our neighbor as ourself is difficult to fathom. Such love is the key that opens the heavenly door. Love breaks down old barriers and resistances. Love is the food of hope among any assembly in prayer.

PRAYING FOR ALL OF CREATION

During the same time that these Gospel readings from Matthew are proclaimed, Pope Francis invites us to celebrate the World Day of Prayer for Creation on September 1, 2017. The words of Eucharistic Prayer III remind us to examine our attitudes regarding how Jesus redeems all of creation. As we pray, "you give life to all things and make them holy," we are invited to reconsider how we treat creation and whether we view all of creation as holy and loving. The words "all you have created rightly gives you praise" relates that the purpose of creation is to praise God. All of creation is part of Jesus' redeeming love found in the Eucharist.

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis offers two prayers for creation. We might want to keep these prayers close at hand, especially this month, as we prepare services for the World Day of Prayer for Creation. These prayers also can be prayed before pastoral council and committee meetings and in the home. The first prayer is appropriate for praying with people of other faiths. In its address to God, the prayer states "you embrace with your tenderness all that exists" and then requests that God teach us "that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty and not pollution and destruction." The second prayer, to be prayed with Christians, addresses each person of the Trinity, stating that the Son of God is alive in every creature and that the Holy Spirit accompanies creation "as it groans in travail." The prayer asks that we may be enlightened to "care for this world in which we live." As Pope Francis states in the encyclical, the prayer requests "inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus." The prayers can be found at the end of the encyclical located at http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

As believers in Jesus, we listen carefully to the prayers spoken at the altar on behalf of our world. We listen attentively to the cries of people in poverty and the search for justice among the bewildered and despairing. The words of Eucharistic Prayer III draw us to the reality that we are with all creation giving God praise. We are not the only beings that God has given life. God has given life to all things and made them holy. The prayer opens us to all of creation as we sip the Real Presence of the Blood of Christ and taste a morsel of love in the Real Presence of the Body of Christ. All creation is moving toward union with God's Kingdom in Christ Jesus. All life is beloved by God. This is the heavy lifting of our prayer and our daily work in the Church. Every human being deserves the basics of life and freedom. As we open up our hearts in prayer and begin to realize our humble place on this beautiful and loving earth, we are moving together toward the Kingdom of the Father. ♦

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