

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 4 & 5, 2015

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All Saints Church
Syracuse, NY

Six-Steps to a Sustainable Society

My Brothers and Sisters.

And here we are at All Saints church, at the beginning of July of the year 2015. We hear about so many things, contradicting, confusing, way beyond one's own abilities or even understanding. We hear about wars and violence in the media, and if we are old enough, we may remember them as horrendous experiences in our own lives. And, as to the present moment, we become more and more aware that we live in an immense ecological crisis, the buzzing word of science among those who observe it and try to figure out what we need to do about it. And then, as matters unfold, we read the encyclical on ecology from pope Francis, the bishop of Rome, making our answers and actions a matter of Christian faith and responsibility.

All right then. First, I would like to bring to mind a clear summary of our situation today written by Kate Raworth, an expert ecologist, defining a safe place for human living on Earth today. This safe space has a ceiling and a floor; the ceiling is defined by our ecological boundaries we should not overstep, and the floor is defined by matters of social and economic justice, we should always respect and practice. Safe place means being sustainable, and sustainable means survival. Kate Raworth's presentation is the third chapter of a book published by the World Watch Institute in 2013 with the title: *The State of the World. Is Sustainability Still Possible?*

For the ceiling of our safe place on Earth, Kate Raworth refers to the nine ecological boundaries we should not overstep. Out of the nine we have already overstepped three resulting in a self reinforcing climate change, a magnitude of never before experienced loss of biodiversity, and a heavy imbalance in the nitrogen cycle on which life on Earth depends. In these matters, we are on no man's land laced with uncertainties. The key concept, staying within this definable safe place, is balance. Off balance situations, such as limitless growth, biological or economic, is not sustainable.

My second observation, I would like to share with you, is not to be overwhelmed by the immensity of tasks before us. It is like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. As we look at the heap of tiny pieces, we have no idea what all this is about. We only know that it is very important that we start right away. As we do so, we acquire knowledge and recognize the edges of the puzzle represented by a straight line, and corners by two such lines. And we find patterns and colors to group the pieces, and we realize that we are not alone in this venture so we add our efforts together. And then the puzzle is solved as the picture appears: God's most beautiful and breathtaking creation of life on Earth we can embrace, use wisely and justly, and protect it against greed and abuse.

As early as in 1982, Lester Brown and Pamela Shaw, two outstanding ecologists, summed up our task in Worldwatch Paper 48 with the title: Six Steps to a Sustainable Society. The six steps are the following:

1. Stabilize World Population. (This means to complete the demographic transition back to balance).
2. Protect Cropland. (The land that provides our food).
3. Reforest the Earth. (A huge sink for CO₂, the cause of global warming).
4. Move Beyond the Throwaway Society. (So that waste will not be part of good economy).
5. Conserve Energy. (Those which are not renewable, most particularly fossil fuels).
6. Develop Renewable Energy (All making use of the immense energy of the Sun).

If we add to these six steps the practice of economic justice, we have a safe haven of life within a sustainable and protected place. In all this science provides realism to our faith, and faith gives meaning to science. My dear Sisters and Brothers, we need to think about all this. Amen.