

April 18 & 19, 2015
Third Sunday of Easter

All Saints Church, Syracuse, NY
Andy Szebenyi, SJ

CHASING ICE HOMILY

My dear Brothers and Sisters. After his resurrection, when Jesus met with his disciples, he greeted them with the words: Peace be with you. So it is important to ask ourselves: What does peace truly mean to us? Peace is the sign of our well being, in terms of both physical and spiritual matters. We experience our final and perfect peace when we realize that the word death vanished from all dictionaries, because it is no more. So we say in the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting." Peace is when love and respect for Life vanquishes all hostility by putting it all into the balance of mutual support, true cooperation, and harmony. 'Peace be with you' says Jesus to his disciples after having conquered death, the last weapon of evil. That is expressed by Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians: "Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?" Peace is the fruit of perfect balance in the unity of all related parts: in ourselves and in our social and physical environment. Only a situation of balance has the true value of sustainability. And peace and sustainability are really the same in terms of our well being.

My Sisters and Brothers, on Monday at 7 pm a documentary will be presented here in All Saints church with the title 'Chasing Ice'. In this documentary we come face to face with the consequences of our actions if they are not motivated by love and respect for all life on the road to peace. The documentary provides us with our present reality that is dominated by greed and self interest, fundamentally hostile to any peace on earth.

There is a wonderful essay, written by Kate Raworth, as the Third Chapter in a book with the title: Is Sustainability Still Possible? Of course, peace and sustainability are two different words but they actually mean the same: that is: Love and Respect for Life. Kate Raworth is a senior researcher at Oxfam, and is presently teaching at Oxford University. The book, Is Sustainability Still Possible? was published by the World Watch Institute in 2013, and the Third Chapter describes the safe place within clear boundaries for sustainable human life on earth. In order to be sustainable, we are to remain within this safe space defined by an ecological ceiling and by the floor of social and economic justice. It is quite tragic that out of 9 ecological boundaries, we have already overstepped 3: The first is climate change due to the large amount of carbon dioxide we have put into the atmosphere ever since the industrial revolution. The second is a huge and never before experienced loss of biodiversity due to the destruction of the habitat of thousands of species. And, the bit more technical, third boundary is the large amount of nitrogen we have removed from the air to be used as a component of artificial fertilizers. The overflow of these fertilizers causes algal eutrophication of lakes and rivers, resulting in the loss of oxygen in the water, and rendering it barren of all other life. Overstepping an ecological boundary puts us into a no-man's land that is as yet undefined, but is certainly hostile to life on earth, including human life.

What does it mean: Climate change? I could illustrate its meaning by modifying the well known hymn: America the Beautiful, which goes this way: “Oh beautiful for spacious sky, for amber waves of grain; for purple mountain majesties across a fruited plain. But all this will be destroyed, destroyed by climate change. A man-made curse, that brought the hearse across a dying plane.”

Climate change means the slow but sure rise of global temperature resulting in the melting of glaciers, and rising sea levels. The consequences of this are the eventual loss of shore lines displacing many millions of people, changes in ocean currents with uncertain effects on sea life, the melting of permafrost releasing methane which is about 20 times as bad as carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas, and the list goes on and on.

My dear Sisters and Brothers. Ever since the industrial revolution our sources of energy have been the various fossil fuels: coal, natural gas, and gasoline. The byproduct of these energy sources if we burn them is among others carbon dioxide a greenhouse gas. It forms a layer in the atmosphere all around the earth. The energy rich sunlight passing through this layer loses energy being shifted down to infrared and heat neither of which can pass now through the greenhouse gas barrier again back into space: they remain trapped heating up the earth's atmosphere. This heating up process is what we mean by global warming. Just a few degrees of global warming can significantly change the climate of the earth. You can experience the same if you park your car out in the sun with windows closed. The sunlight can go through the plastic windows into the car but by doing so it loses energy and is not able to be reflected back again into the air outside the car. It is trapped and heats up the air inside the car.

All right then, instead of fossil fuels why don't we use the far richer and far more abundant energy of the sun? To answer this question follow the money. Who benefits by not changing from fossil fuels to sun related sources of energy?

When I came into this country in 1963, if I remember well, the price for one gallon of gasoline was 64 cent. In the early seventies because of the oil embargo the price went up to over one dollar per gallon. The Volvo car manufacturing company gave the task to an engineer close to retirement to construct a car that is more efficient than what was on the market at that time. He built a car out of light components. That is why it was called the light component project or LCP. In addition to a very light car with good aerodynamic stability, he used a diesel engine, and the result was close to 90 miles per gallon on the highways. Then the oil prices began to come down again, and the company cancelled the project saying that it won't sell. The same happened to the electric car.

My Dear Sisters and Brothers. Peace be with you!