

Intimacy with Brothers & Sisters of Environment
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Since some times I was thinking of writing an article about environment. But whenever I think of it a statue comes to my mind. It is a statue of St. Francis Assisi, who is a popular and much loved saint in India. Sitting on the outstretched hands or flying around the Adam-size statue of Francis there are some 15 to 20 birds of the air. Then, there are small statues of frolicking children dancing hand-in-hand around the bronze statue.

The statue stands in a natural environment at a place called Rivo Torto near the town of Assisi, the birth place of St. Francis. In good old days there was a hut and Francis and his companions lived in hut close to the nature maintaining their intimacy with the whole environment.

As I see, St. Francis Assisi provides us a wonderful example in dealing with the environment and maintain intimate relationship with whole creation. The bronze statue is a wonderful symbol of intimacy with the nature. Then, we can see in the “Canticle of Brother Sun’ written by St. Francis Assisi the love and commitment of the saint towards the environment. St. Francis used to call the whole creation ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. Read his well known Canticle of Brother Sun:

“All praise be yours, my Lord, through all that you have made,
And first my lord Brother Sun,
Who brings the day; and light you give to us through him.
How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendour!
Of you, Most High, he bears the likeness.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars;
In the heavens you have made them, bright
And precious and fair.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
And fair and stormy, all the weather’s moods,
By which you cherish all that you have made.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Water,
So useful, lowly, precious and pure.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
Through whom you brighten up the night.
How beautiful is he, how gay! Full of power and strength.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother,
Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces
Various fruits with coloured flowers and herbs.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon
For love of you; through those who endure
Sickness and trail.
Happy those who endure in peace,
By you, Most High, they will be crowned.
All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death,
From whose embrace no mortal can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!

Happy those She finds doing your will!
The second death can do no harm to them.
Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,
And serve him with great humility.”

Today like Francis we need to love the whole environment of God’s creation. We need to know something of the nature and the whole environment so that we can truly love them and commit ourselves to maintain them. God has not created anything in the whole creation animate and inanimate world which is useless. Everything in the nature has a purpose. Everything depends on one another. They are supportive of one another. If we fully grasp this truth, then we will not only appreciate the whole creation but we also love everything in it.

Today we know that some variety of animals, trees and plants are extinct in our world! In this situation we should preserve and provide suitable ambient for all types of animals, insects, trees and plants so that they can survive and flourish in suitable environment.

Take, for instance, the birds. All types of birds are our winged friends. But due to the negligence and selfishness of people some categories of birds are extinct from the face of the earth and some other types are on the way to extinction! Some birds migrate to other places either to breed or to escape from perverse environment. Many types of birds visit Nalsarovar in Gujarat in winter. Some birds build nests and nestle young ones and in due time go back to their places of origin.

A most important contribution of the birds is the spreading of trees and plants. For instances, take the example of sweet nimb tree. It is common to see small saplings around a nimb tree. But you will also find lonely sweet nimb trees growing up in unexpected places. How? The birds eat the fruits of nimb trees and throw the seeds far and wide causing the sweet nimb tree to grow up in far away places. Thus the birds cause a wide variety of trees and plants to grow up far and wide. The birds do another important service to humanity. They eat up insects which often could damage to crops in the fields and plants and fruit trees in our gardens. The damaging insects are the food of the birds. The birds are great helpers of farmers as they protect the field-crops from being destroyed by insects.

Similarly the honey bees do a wonderful job in pollinating flower plants and fruit trees. Winds and bird do much of pollination in the plant world. But without the services of the honey bees in pollination much of our cultivation in the fields would not bear much fruits. Perhaps some people are not aware of these great services of the honey bees, who burn or otherwise destroy honey combs to get some honey. St. Francis has appreciated the services of honey bees pointing them as examples of hard work for us men and women.

Like the birds and honey bees, the insignificant insects and worms are also great benefactors of the people. In the rainy season we see some kind of string-like worms in the grounds and fields. These worms have a lot to do to make the fields fertile. The field worms plough the fields in their own way. These worms make way for the air and water to penetrate into the earth and make the field to produce abundant yields. Some insects and worms transform even rocks and biological wastes into fertile land. So the scientist in evaluating the fertility of a land, often count the number of earthen worms in a place of investigation.

Looking from this point of view in our animate and inanimate world, there is nothing which is not useful to us. So in the whole creation all animate and inanimate beings have a great role to play. It is true that in the whole creation only the human beings are independent with intelligence and the power of language. Thus the human beings may be considered the crown of creation. Even then the human beings have no right to destroy, damage or misuse any other animate and inanimate beings.

In the first book of the Bible, 'Genesis' there is the story of creation. God created human beings after creating everything else and said to the first man and woman: "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky and every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen: 1, 28). Here the words 'subdue' and 'have dominion' have to be understood properly. 'Subduing and having dominion' do not mean lording over all animate beings and inanimate things; but they call for our love and care. Human beings have the responsibility to love and to protect them. Giving the gift of intelligence God has made men and women his/her partners in creation and preservation.

If we look at the environment from the point of morality, we know that we live and we owe our existence to the whole creation around us. We need for our existence oxygen, food, clean water, unpolluted air, etc. All these things come to us thanks to the environment around us. From the point of ethics we have to deal with the whole creation around us in the same way as we expect others to deal with us – that is, with love and concern.

But it is an undeniable fact that we are misusing many living and inanimate beings and we go to the extent of destroying some of them! In this situation we need to realize that on the path of misusing and destroying animate and inanimate beings around us, we are in the process of destroying ourselves! We human beings behave as if we are the masters and rulers of the whole creation. We accept that we belong to the animal kingdom with the distinguishing power of intelligence and language. But this exceptional power of intelligence and language are not to be used for overloading over the whole creation. But they are to be used for taking responsibility for the whole creation and use them to love, respect and preserve the whole creation.

St. Francis Assisi has shown us the way to love and respect the whole creation. So let us become the protectors of our environment instead of becoming destroyers. Let us build up intimacy with our environment and the whole creation. (contact the author: ciss@satyam.net.in)

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