

Bishop Mark MacDonald

Keynote Address : "Celebrating the Spirit of Creation"

Green Churches Forum,
Ottawa, May 11, 2017



Notes

From the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to the Dakota Access Pipeline issue, I have seen great progress in the understanding of environmentalists and church environmentalists. The publication of *Laudato Si* is a great step forward. In all, there is a growing understanding of the importance of these matters and the connection with Indigenous Peoples.

However, we still witness a progressive alienation between human beings and the environment. This is visible even among environmentalists and church related environmentalists. In discussions around the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, I have noticed that people lament the loss of wilderness without realizing the symbiotic relationship we have with Creation. If there are no more "wild" places, we will be less than human, as our humanity depends on Creation. We may have blood pumping through our veins and air processed in our lungs but without Creation, we are not what God meant us to be.

I have even noticed among Christian environmentalists a progressive alienation: those proposing a limited selection of the lectionary focus on the environment cause confusion among Indigenous peoples who see the Creation in all of Scripture.

This progressive alienation is certainly related to philosophical matters, materialism and scientism, for example. But a Scriptural focus relates this alienation to idolatry, particularly in the form of greed. Greed has become such a normal part of life that it is hardly noticed. It has become an animating part of our economy and culture.

We must also realize that we are dealing with what Paul called the "principalities and powers," what we might call institutions, ideologies, and images. The corporations, political organizations, and cultural expressions of life are all a part of the progressive alienation of humanity from Creation. They are powerful and pervasive.

This calls us to return to the roots of our Scriptural and theological environmentalism. It is in the baptismal font and in the Eucharist.

The four simple acts of the Eucharist - Receive, Bless, Break, and Share describe more than just a ceremony - they describe a way of life. This is in contrast to the way of life of our First Parents who took, abused, and then hid from the consequences of their actions.

In our basic acts of Christian faith there is an environmental ethic that has been hidden from us by our participation in a culture that is progressively alienating us from Creation. In the Ojibwe language, Akiwensi describes a male elder as one who "cares for the land." To grow morally is to grow in your care and awareness of Creation. This is as it should be with us.

When the Pebble Mine was proposed in Alaska, the Orthodox Church showed its opposition by blessing the waters that were to be impacted by the development. They unveiled the sacredness of the waters as a way of opposing the progressive devaluation of the land, due to our progressive alienation from it. We are called to do the same.



The story of the heart-shaped berry

The story of the heart-shaped berry, as is the Anishinaabe name for the strawberry, is forever linked to Midewiwin, Society of Good Hearted Ones, a prestigious and important association of male and female healers and thinkers that is said to have been founded many strings of life (literally thousands of years) ago.

According to one tradition, the Midewiwin was founded by the first herbalist/medicine man of his People, who went by the legendary name of Ode'imin (Heart Berry or strawberry). When a plague struck the Anishinaabeg, this 15-year old boy was one of many who died, and as he entered the Land of Souls he pleaded with GICHI-MANIDOO to save his people from this destructive epidemic. GICHI-MANIDOO was so impressed by the admirable altruism of the young fellow that he brought him back to life and sent him back to earth on a mission of revival and hope.

Under the skillful tutelage of his supernatural teacher Wiinabozho, who taught him to study the nature of plants from the conduct of animals, Ode'imin hereupon brought his People the Midewiwin, the grand Medicine Society that forever institutionalized the knowledge of curing, and he taught them about mino-bimaadiziwin. This Good Code for Long Life and Upright Living led to the physical and moral healing of the Anishinaabe Peoples.

Ode'imin taught the People the properties and the curative powers of all beings of the plant world and conferred to them the philosophy of mino-bimaadiziwin, which would forever be propagated through the ceremonies of the Midewiwin. Ode'imin explained to the ancestors that a healer could only reach the highest possible order of healing powers through a high ethical standard, and not by knowledge alone. What counted were not only knowledge of plant and self, but also the ability to bring together the healing capacities of both plant and self. Only a herbalist gifted with and keeping up a high standard of inner power could expect the plant being to reveal his own healing power; only then would the plant allow the herbalist to confer his or her inner curative power upon the plant itself. And to this day, whenever or wherever they establish their villages and homes, the Anishinaabeg never neglect their duty to annually honor, celebrate, and carry on the gift of knowledge that was handed down to their ancestors by Ode'imin, the Heart Shaped Berry. And into this day, each spring and each summer Ode'imin is remembered and celebrated by the People, for the blossom of the strawberry symbolizes Ode'imin's first life and the berry itself his second.

Source: Przybilla and Councillor, Ojibwe Tales, 21-2.