



A Liturgy for the Butterflies

*An Ecumenical Liturgy
for Monarch Butterflies and Imperiled Pollinators
In Honor of Rachel Carson
on the 50th Anniversary of Her Death*

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Liturgy for the Butterflies

Procession

with Children's Choir, singing "If I Were a Butterfly/The Butterfly Song" by Brian Howard (see YouTube version)

Introductory Rite

(for three readers)

FIRST READER: In the week before Passover, hundreds of tons of wild bitter herbs came into Jerusalem, and Jesus himself took his last journey into the Holy City on a donkey.

SECOND READER: All the children ran to meet him, raising palm fronds and laying down branches of sycamore leaves on the path before him. They cried out to him in glad voices,

THIRD READER: "Hosanna in the highest, let our Monarch enter this Holy Place. Blessed are you, who have come to us with your abundant mercy."

FIRST READER: And so today, we welcome another kind of monarch, a humble butterfly, back into our country, after its pilgrimage of many perils as it fled its overwintering grounds to go through its iconic metamorphosis here among the wild bitter herbs of this land.

SECOND READER: To keep these monarchs alive as God's creatures and as emblems of international cooperation, to ensure safe passage across all borders, we dedicate this mass to these butterflies and other imperiled pollinators who help to bring us our daily bread.

THIRD READER: We also dedicate this mass to the memory of the scientist who first alerted us to the perils faced by monarchs and other pollinators in her book, *Silent Spring*, which inspired millions of people to take better care of God's diverse creation.

Greeting

ONE: The grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God's creation, and the communion of all creatures through the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

MANY: *And with your spirit.*

Penitential Act

ONE: we confess to our Creator, to one another, our brothers and sisters, and to all of creation, that our own actions to care for you and for all of God's creatures have often missed the mark.

MANY: And so we have greatly sinned, in our own thoughts, words and actions, and what we have done that caused harm to creation and what we have failed to do to offer it our most tender and diligent care.

ONE: We therefore ask our Lord and his blessed mother Mary, all the angels, all the saints, and all the species, and you, our human brothers and sisters, to pray for us,

MANY: That we may be forgiven, inspired and emboldened to begin anew as caretakers of God's creation.

ONE: May the most merciful God grant us forgiveness, and transform us through the process of spiritual metamorphosis, so that we will realize everlasting life.

Kyrie

ONE: Lord, have mercy.

MANY: *Lord, have mercy.*

ONE: Christ, have mercy.

MANY: *Christ, have mercy.*

ONE: Lord, have mercy.

MANY: *Lord, have mercy.*

ALL: May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.



Song of Praise

Glory be to God,
Father, Mother, Elder Brother.
Even by saying your name
We feel your sacredness gather.
All thanks to be God,
Well-spring of all being,
Source of all that is holy,
Maker of our splendid planet home,
To you we sing praise.
Blessed be our Lord
In all of the creatures.
We add our songs to theirs
In glorious praise.

Collect

O Lord, you have permitted us to live
on this rich and marvelous globe,
where so many lovely creatures give us such delight.
They enrich our lives and provide our daily bread.
But you also call us to participate
in our own spiritual transformation, our own
metanoia,
just as butterflies and moths undergo their form of
metamorphosis,
and you call us to participate as Earth's stewards
in the sacred duty of caring for your creation.
May our own spiritual journeys humble us
and help us become better stewards
of the God-given bounty on our planet.

Meditation

Now the land itself, the only one they knew and
knew intimately, began to terrify them. The sun was
blazing down, the air was sweet, but every lead that
the wind lifted, every rustle of a pheasant hen in a
clump of ryegrass, sent needles of fear through their
veins. The cardinals, the gray squirrels, the garden
snakes, the butterflies, the ground hogs and rabbits
– all the affectionate things that had peopled their
lives ever since they were born became ominous
signs of a presence that was searching for them,
following them, following them.
–Toni Morrison, *Song of Solomon*

Reading from the Hebrew Scriptures

(For three readers)

FIRST READER: In the beginning when God
created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a
formless void and darkness covered the face of the
deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of
the waters.

SECOND READER: Then God said, "Let there be
light"; and there was light. And God saw that the
light was good; and God separated the light from
the darkness.

God called the light Day, and the darkness he
called Night. And there was evening and there was
morning, the first day.

THIRD READER: And God said, "Let there be a
dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate
the waters from the waters." So God made the
dome and separated the waters that were under the
dome from the waters that were above the dome.

FIRST READER: And it was so. God called the
dome "Sky." And there was evening and there was
morning, the second day.

SECOND READER: And God said, "Let the
waters under the sky be gathered together into one
place, and let the dry land appear."

THIRD READER: And it was so. God called the
dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered
together he called Seas. And God saw that it was
good.

SECOND READER: Then God said, "Let the
earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed,
and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit
with the seed in it."

THIRD READER: And it was so. The earth
brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of
every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit
with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good.
And there was evening and there was morning, the
third day.

SECOND READER: And God said, "Let there be
lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day
from the night; and let them be for signs and for
seasons and for days and years, and let them be
lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the
earth."

THIRD READER: And it was so. God made the
two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and

the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.

FIRST READER: And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

SECOND READER: And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind.

THIRD READER: And God saw that it was good. God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

FIRST READER: And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

SECOND READER: And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.”

THIRD READER: And it was so. God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

SECOND READER: Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

THIRD READER: So God created humankind in God’s own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

FIRST READER: God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

SECOND READER: God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit;

you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”

THIRD READER: And it was so. God saw everything that he had made,

ALL READERS: and indeed, it was very good.
—from Genesis 1:1-31a (NRSV)

Epistle Reading

A reading from 2 Corinthians 5: 16-17:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from the human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away, see, everything has become new. (NRSV)

Gospel Reading

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Matthew 16: 24-6. Listen now, for the word of God:

“Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up the cross and follow me. For those who want to save a life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?’”

This is the world of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Homily

Let us think about the Gospel in relation to a letter written by the great American scientist and nature writer, Rachel Carson. She wrote the following letter to her best friend just a little more than 50 years ago, when she was suffering from cancer and probably realized that she would die, as she did, within less than a year’s time.

September 10, 1963

Dear One,

This is a postscript to our morning at Newagen, something I think I can write better than say. For me it was one of the loveliest of the summer’s hours, and all the

details will remain in my memory: that blue September sky, the sounds of the wind in the spruces and surf on the rocks, the gulls busy with their foraging, alighting with deliberate grace, the distant views of Griffiths Head and Todd Point, today so clearly etched, though once half seen in swirling fog. But most of all I shall remember the monarchs, that unhurried westward drift of one small winged form after another, each drawn by some invisible force. We talked a little about their migration, their life history. Did they return? We thought not; for most, at least, this was the closing journey of their lives.

But it occurred to me this afternoon, remembering, that it had been a happy spectacle, that we had felt no sadness when we spoke of the fact that there would be no return. And rightly—for when any living thing has come to the end of its life cycle we accept that end as natural. For the Monarch, that cycle is measured in a known span of months. For ourselves, the measure is something else, the span of which we cannot know. But the thought is the same: when that intangible cycle has run its course it is a natural and not unhappy thing that a life comes to an end.

That is what those brightly fluttering bits of life taught me this morning. I found a deep happiness in it—so I hope, may you. Thank you for this morning.

Rachel

And yet, while Rachel Carson completed her own life cycle, her influence on many of us was not over, for she has been transformed into one of the most inspiring voices that has ever lead us toward a deeper care for creation. She helped us see the perils that human actions may cause for other creatures, like the monarch, in her ground-breaking book, *Silent Spring*. If the excessive and untargeted use of toxic chemicals on agricultural lands happens to annihilate the pollinators required to produce nutritious seeds and fruits, we will be left not only with silent springs but with fruitless falls.

Today, monarchs, as well as many kinds of bees, are at risk in much of American farm country. No one intended to cause their precipitous declines over the last 12 years—not farmers, herbicide or pesticide applicators, or agrichemical producers—and yet they now number fewer than at any point in our lifetime.

To bring monarchs back so that our children and grandchildren might be awestruck, as we have

been, by their beauty, by their chrysalis during metamorphosis, and by their wondrous migration of thousands of miles to their overwintering grounds, we need to dedicate ourselves to caring for creation like never before. We must plant milkweeds and other wildflowers, we must refrain from using chemicals carelessly, and we must protect their habitats on farms, along highways, railroad tracks, transmission lines and along corridors in other public spaces. We must guide them along their own “underground railroad,” from one safe haven until the next. And we must teach our children and our neighbors to do the same.

Concluding Rite

The Lord be with you.

Response: *And also with you.*

Blessing

May almighty God bless you and all other creatures, in the name of the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Response: *Amen.*

Dismissal

Go forth to love and serve the Lord and all creation.

May we turn our thanksgiving into commitment to care for Sister Earth, Our Mother.

Procession and Departing Song

Select one of the following:

“Mariposa,” by Silvio Rodriguez (in Spanish, on YouTube)

“Butterfly,” by Mariah Carey and Walter Afanasieff, (on YouTube or CD)

“Mariposa Monarca,” by Zamor (in Spanish on YouTube)

“Goin’ Down to Mexico/The Monarch Butterfly Song” by Lucas Miller (YouTube)

