

Daily Meditation 04/23/22

Thomas Berry on Creation Spirituality & Our Sacred Earth

Good morning.

Yesterday, we celebrated Earth Day by sharing with you some of the powerful insights from Thomas Berry, one of the great prophets of saving the Earth in our time; he died a few years ago. But today we kind of continue the dialogue with Thomas Berry, because he does have a lot to say about a lot of things. And in this particular essay that he wrote – he wrote it for my 60th birthday – he makes some points that are very common to him.

And one thing I heard him speak dozens of times, he never once spoke without citing Thomas Aquinas. He loved Thomas Aquinas, who has this sense of the cosmos, and repeats it in many ways. So I'm going to share with you a few of Thomas Aquinas' teachings, because for one thing, Thomas Berry was named after Thomas Aquinas, and he took that nomenclature very seriously.

And I cite the amazing statement from Aquinas, that

Salvation means first and primary --

-- first and primary--

Salvation means to preserve things in the good.

And I'm citing from *The Tao of Thomas Aquinas, Fierce Wisdom for Hard Times*.

To "preserve things in the good" --now, he's not talking about saving your individual soul from going to hell, is he, or he's not talking about climbing on top of others to get to heaven, is he?

The "first and primary meaning of salvation" -- to me this changes 500 years of Christian thinking overnight. And this is what he calls in today's essay, a fetish. I believe he calls it a fetish about redemption. Fixation, he calls it, the "Western mind's exclusive redemption fixation."

Let's move from there to the more primordial experience available for the Western soul in the universe itself. So Berry gets it: he's inviting our soul to grow, to get out of our petty egoism and anthropocentrism and connect to the whole, and of course, you've heard me cite many times: Aquinas says

the most wonderful thing about the human person is that we connect to the universe.

And that is not present when everything gets reduced to consumerism and the pettiness that drives joy out of our hearts and souls. So just this one statement by Aquinas, about salvation being first and primary, about preserving things in the good. And of course, to preserve in the good means things are good!

We've landed on a beautiful Earth, on a good Earth. And that's what Genesis 1 says. It's all good. It's all good. It's all good. Oh! Together, it's very good!

And that word in Hebrew can be translated "beautiful": it is beautiful. It is beautiful. This is beautiful. That's beautiful. The rivers are beautiful. The forests are beautiful. The animals are beautiful. The humans are beautiful. Together, it is very beautiful.

So Thomas Aquinas and Thomas Berry are on the same page, you better believe it.

Now, Aquinas talks about "sheer goodness," that God is sheer goodness. And in another place he talks about God as "sheer joy." Aquinas says:

All things are good because they flow from the fount of goodness. We can praise God through all things.

And notice, you can praise God through all things. You don't just praise God in a church, or a mosque or a temple, but through all things. But we have to be hunter gatherers looking for the goodness of things, looking for beauty, having that as a value in our lives.

God is a fount of goodness who bestows the infinite goodness on each creature according to its unique capacity.

So there's no stinginess in the part of God. We've talked earlier about the generosity of the sun in that beautiful poem from Hafiz. Well, Aquinas is struck by the generosity of divinity, that the infinite goodness has been poured into us. And we accept as much as we're capable of, whether we be a tree, or a stone, or Earth, or a human being.

Goodness is everywhere. Aquinas says every being, as being, is good. We live, breathe, and swim in a world of goodness. This is panentheism. He himself invokes Genesis 1: how God saw all things that were made and were very good. But he also takes on anthropocentrism:

It is false to say that humanity is the most excellent being in the world.

That's words from St. Thomas Aquinas, Doctor of the Church. He says: "God wills that human beings exist for the sake of the perfection" -- which can mean "maturity or wholeness" -- "of the universe."

The universe is the most excellent thing.

So, this is the spirit of Thomas Berry. This is the spirit of Thomas Aquinas. And this is a kind of consciousness that will inspire us, not make us feel guilty, but inspire us to work for the sake of Mother Earth in these dangerous times.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.