

Spiritual Message – April 2016
Quebec Provincial Leadership Team
RESPECT FOR CREATION AND HUMANITY



For this third spiritual message we will focus on another value prioritized by the Provincial Leadership Team: respect for creation and humanity.

We are inspired by a text from David Fines and from the experience of the prophet Jonah whom he calls prophet of the environment.¹

Respect for creation

Contrary to the prophets who preceded him, Jonah would have a special mission entrusted to him by God: he would have a universal mission. Jonah was not sent to the king, or to his own people, or to the tribes in exile, but to pagans: “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city ... a three days’ walk across.” (Jonah 1: 2-3) In the Bible, the number three indicates totality and, in this context, signifies that all people are called to conversion.

This universalism extends even beyond the human condition. On the ship which he took to “flee from the presence of God”, while first refusing this mission to preach conversion to a foreign people, Jonah was asked: “Where do you come from? What is your country? What is your nationality?” (Jonah 1: 8) “I am a Hebrew,” he replied. “I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land.” (Jonah 1: 9) The God of Jonah, our God, is a God who cares for all of his creation, without exception, in its entirety: humanity, fauna, flora, and their environment.

In this profession of faith, Jonah witnesses to an all-powerful Creator God who will calm the storm in order to save the mariners who had welcomed him. Did Jonah not know that the storm was a sign of God’s anger towards him? As soon as he is thrown into the water, the sea becomes calm and the mariners, these “Gentiles”, turn to the Lord. Subsequently, Jonah experiences God saving his life by means of the large fish which swallows him up and then spews him out upon dry land. From there he leaves for Nineveh, finally obeying the Lord.

Through his word and his journey through the city, Jonah converted the entire population, the king, and even the animals who had also fasted. In view of the rapid conversion of the Ninevites, Jonah became angry. He had difficulty being open to this universalism of salvation and especially to forgiving these people who were enemies. Even though God had given him the power of speaking so effectively as to lead to definitive and collective conversions, Jonah continued to think more about his own comfort than about the common good. It is hoped that eventually he was moved enough by God’s compassion so as to reflect it. “Then the Lord spoke again: “Listen, you are concerned about the bush, for which you did not labour and which you did not grow; it came into being in a night and perished in a night. And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great

¹ Fines, David, *Jonas le prophète de l’environnement*, Montréal, 2011.

city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?” (Jonah 4: 10-11)

Jonah had a difficult message to convey: a call to conversion. And we too have a difficult message to convey: the message that life on our planet is in danger of deteriorating permanently if we do not convert!

Respect for humanity

God “who made the sea and the continents” still wants to be present among us in everything we do to bring about solutions to the ecological crisis which we are currently experiencing. He is co-creator with us. He walks with us. He sends us into large cities, to as many people as possible, to proclaim the word which will make them understand the state of the planet in peril.

Does Jonah not show us that we often have to face misunderstanding, close-mindedness and opposition when we bring our message of care for creation? Even if we are hesitant, even if our behaviour can disturb others, does not our message come from our Creator who tells us to be guardians of creation in the face of the dangers of the unlimited growth of technology and of human exploitation of natural resources beyond reasonable limits?

“It is to us that Jesus seems to be saying that as a sign concerning the ecological crisis which threatens us, there will be no sign stronger than that of Jonah.”²

We know that the effects of climate change especially impact the countries of the South, the developing countries and thereby the poorest of people. Do we not hear the word of God saying to us: “What have you done to your brother, your sister?” Think about some of the Pacific Islands already inundated by rising sea levels. These people have to start their lives over somewhere else, but under what conditions?

May our environmental responsibility, rooted in the heart of our faith, compel us to safeguard creation by our daily actions, in response to “God’s loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance.”³

Questions for reflection and sharing



1. What do I retain from the story of Jonah?
2. How do I view my responsibility to take care of “our common home”?
3. Our SNJM charism invites us to be an educative presence in our world. How can I link this to the call to care for God’s creation?

² Fines, David, *Jonas le prophète de l’environnement*, Montréal, 2011, p. 34.

³ Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’* on care for our common home No. 76