

**Homily, North American Conference
Wednesday, October 9, 2024
Fr. Jim Schroeder, SCJ**

Readings: Micah 4.1-4; Matthew 5.20-24

This globe of ours “is like a garden for humankind. It has been adorned by a great artist and his students. The artist is God; his students are people—the artists of Earth. God, the great artist, sowed the wonder of his great art across this globe—the great sea which reflects the blue sky, the austere or delightful lakes, the snowy mountains, the dark forests, the volcanoes which rumble, the rivers which rush, the serene valleys, the mysterious grottoes.

“What immense depth has the ocean! What breadth! . . . What we have been able to explore is a mere nothing! And the Heart of Jesus is like that too!

“The ocean is the heart of the earth. It receives all the rivers with their filth, and it sends them back as rain to fertilize all the earth with its purified waters. One can see here a symbol of the Heart of Jesus, which receives all the rivers of our sins in its depths of reparation and expiation, and sends back to us all the currents of grace.

“Climates have an infinite variety: in the north, the endless hoar-frost, the great architectural forests, the pine whose needles bend beneath the winter snows. Southward from that lie the prairies, always verdant, the wheat which turns gold, the oak, young elm, chestnut, whose leaves—like a rich tapestry, adorned with the most vivid colors by the autumn sun—become a plaything of the winds in winter. Then comes the earthly garden: the vineyards, the olive, orange, and palm trees. Finally, the countries of the sun, in which there is abundant life in the prodigious forests.” “Contact with beauty beautifies the soul.” . . .

These rhapsodic reflections come from none other than our Founder, Leo Gustave Dehon, known in community as John of the Heart of Jesus. Yes, Leo Dehon wrote these. Dehon traveled widely and loved all creation. He taught this to his disciples. As followers of Dehon, how can we contemplate or condone the polluting of our Mother Earth. How can we tolerate and do nothing as God’s people continue to bake and destroy God’s artistry.

Although Dehon never heard the term “global warming,” he lived in the pollution of the industrial revolution in Saint Quentin. And, worse than that, even though Dehon never heard of nuclear weapons, he knew the horrors of war and what it does to creation. In the Franco Prussian war he worked as a chaplain, and wrote, “It passed like a long and terrible nightmare, filled to overflowing with anguish and sufferings.” And then in World War I, he wrote: “My Congregation is decimated”—33 SCJs died, San Quentin was on the front line and occupied for 31 months. Dehon laments, “We have been trapped here as one would be in a city under siege,” no newspapers, no mail, no travel.

“There is general panic. So many lives are being mowed down during these days. All the field hospitals are filling up. This is an agonizing time for me. Fears for my family, for my homeland, for my Congregation. Resources will be lacking. Benefactors are holding back.” “A new scourge is being added to the war and to the hunger from which the people are suffering: typhus is beginning to overrun our field hospitals. . . . A . . . nurse has brought typhus into our house. What will come of this?” “Poverty is making itself felt. Provisions are becoming scarce and very expensive. Life is extremely difficult both physically and mentally. *Fiat!*”

Dehon was held prisoner there till February 1917 when the Germans evacuated everyone, and he was a refugee in a boxcar, on a train to Belgium where the Jesuits welcomed him. When he returned in two years later, he wrote, “The sight devastated me . . . It was a desolate pile of rubble. There was practically nothing left of St. John’s College or of Sacred Heart House, or of Fayet.

And now to us, what about us today: God urges us to not only give up our desire to kill, but also give up nursing our anger. God urges us to not only put our weapons of war aside, like keeping nuclear stockpiles, but to turn them into something that helps and feeds people. For God proclaims peace.

As we enter Eucharist now, let us thank God for the beauty of his creation, and may we commit ourselves to protect it from pollution and global warming, and from the “long, terrible nightmare” of war in any form.