



IMMACULATE HEART^{OF}MARY CATHOLIC CHURCH

A LETTER FROM THE PASTOR APRIL 26, 2020

Dear friends in the Risen Lord,

The first Earth Day, April 22, 1970, is a powerful memory for me. I was in the seventh grade at Clarke Junior High in Athens, and the entire school decamped to the University of Georgia for a day of “teach-in.” As a seventh-grader, I would have been excited to visit a high school; but to spend a day rubbing elbows with college students was exhilarating beyond words. (Since my father was a professor, college faculty had long ago been thoroughly de-mystified!)

But it was not just the university surroundings that were stimulating; the workshops on air and water pollution (although some of the science and math may have been beyond my comprehension) made a lasting impact; and I was introduced to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, which had been published in 1962, and which I would read many times over the coming decades.

Historians suggest that that first Earth Day led directly to the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency and the passage of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act and the Endangered Species Act. Closer to home, it led to the introduction of high school classes like Environmental Biology, during which we students took field trips to lakes and rivers around Athens—and to the public water works—and tested the water for chemical and biological contaminants.

Ten years later, when I began my theological studies for the priesthood, those early experiences would shed scientific light on the reverence for God’s creation that I found in Sacred Scripture and in the Church’s long tradition, from Genesis, through St. Francis of Assisi, to Pope St. John Paul II. And, of course, that tradition continues right up to the encyclical *Laudato Si* of Pope Francis.

On this 50th anniversary of Earth Day, and on the 5th anniversary of *Laudato Si*, we at IHM can be proud and grateful that the same magisterial tradition has led to the creation of our own *Laudato Si* Action Team, to the construction of a rectory powered (when the pandemic passes) by solar panels and a church illuminated entirely by LED.

Laudato Si, indeed! Praise be to you, O Lord!