

# Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Homily I on “The Umbrella of Life”

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January 14/15, 2017

I'm holding in my hand an UMBRELLA, and though I'm probably risking all sorts of dark omens for opening it indoors, I wanted to show it to you to illustrate what it does, what its purpose is. When you open it, and the skies are pouring down buckets of rain, it protects you, keeps you dry and comfortable, and doesn't ruin your new hairdo. In tropical climates, an open umbrella can protect you from the harmful rays of the sun and serves as a shade tree that walks with you as you go about your business or spreads over you as you lounge on some exotic beach. An open umbrella is kinda like a small tent: if you have one open, people are attracted to it like a moth to light or a bee to a flower ... people tend to gather together to converse, to snuggle ... even under this smallest of shelters. Also, an upheld umbrella serves as a kind of beacon or banner to follow when you're touring in a strange place where you don't know the language or the streets and could easily become lost. That upheld umbrella guides you to the safety of the herd under the knowledgeable leadership of the tour guide.

But beyond simple practicalities, the umbrella acts as an image for life and the human family: each section of the umbrella could represent the stages of life from infancy and childhood, to teen and young adult, to prime years and middle age, to active senior and revered elder. Each section could also stand for the races and the continents, the philosophies and religions, the sexes and the sects: all of them,

different though they may be, still under the one tent of the human family. And, the larger the umbrella, the better it could open to include all that supports life: natural resources like air and light and water, soil and sea and mountain, marine life and the wild kingdom, insects that creep and birds that soar, crops that grow and trees that give oxygen - all of it under the glorious canopy of Creation.

But, as I look at this umbrella, I'm kinda sad cuz I think we've really lost something. What we've lost isn't new ... the very first family lost it back when Cain murdered his brother Abel in a fit of jealous rage and when God demanded an accounting from him, Cain had the gall to ask, "Am I my brother's keeper??" to which the Creator responded, "What have you done ... what have you done??!!"

We've lost the sense that we are our brothers' keepers. We've lost the sense that we are the stewards of the earth. We've lost the sense that we are - ALL OF US - from God, and, if so, then sacred. We forget that when we speak dismissively to one another, when we trash one another on social media, when we belittle one another and count ourselves superior. We forget that when we view children and elders as disposable, when we pollute and pillage to fuel our hunger for energy, when we hoard and stockpile to gain more wealth, when we eye the stranger with fear and suspicion and sit at the table only with my clan, my ilk.

When we act as islands, as monoliths rising up from the maelstrom of existence, we forget that the other is indeed my brother, that life is a precious gift that must be defended, guarded, cherished, protected, and continually renewed lest the gift be lost, never to recover, never to thrive again, extinct.

This little umbrella reminds me that I share this tent with the whole human family and all of Creation as well. But the tent is fragile and if I do not do my part to take care of it, it could turn inside out, blow away before the winds of selfishness and ignorance; and all that lives and matters would drown in the torrent of my carelessness. And then, my God, what would my God ask of me??

What have you done ... what have you done??