Extinction Grieving Prayer

Use two candles; prepare suggested (or other) music and video. Directions are starred. Adapt in any way that facilitates use.

Call to Prayer

. . .today, the dusky seaside sparrow became extinct. It may never be as famous as the pterodactyl or the dodo, but the last one died today . . . .

An excerpt from "Science" by Alison Hawthorne Deming

What you call resources, we call our relatives. Source unknown.

* Light the first candle. It honors all the species that have gone extinct in our lifetimes.

Great Giver of Life, we pause to remember our place at the beginning of the Sixth Great Extinction on Planet Earth. For 13.8 billion years creation has been groaning: bringing to birth, becoming more complex, more organized, more conscious. The other great extinctions during the past 450 million years happened by forces beyond anyone's control. Now, for the first time, our species is ruining whole ecosystems, aborting entire groups of interdependent species. We acknowledge that we play a part in this dying by our carelessness, ignorance, and indifference. Forgive us our part in the death of healthy ecosystems and the resulting extinction of creatures in whom we believe divinity lives and acts.

Litany of Affirmation

We affirm the Sacred Mystery that caused and continues Creation.

We affirm the 13.8 billion years of our Universe.

We affirm the billions of galaxies, each with its billions of solar systems and stars.

We affirm the multiple transformations during the 4.5 billion years of Mother Earth's life so far, and the relentless evolution towards ever-greater consciousness in the future.

We affirm the millions of species that have inhabited our planet in beautifully-webbed communities: microorganisms, plants, fish, birds, mammals . . . .

We affirm that we came from Earth and exist, like all species, in a communion of subjects.
Litany of Grief

We grieve humans' lack of awareness of, and concern about, the destruction of interdependent communities that have taken billions of years to develop.

We grieve the climate disaster that is extinguishing habitats and the multiple species within them.

We grieve the more than one-in-four flowering plants, the one-in-five mammals, the nearly one-in-three amphibians, and the one-in-eight birds that are vulnerable to being wiped out completely. (International Union for the Conservation of Nature)

We grieve the Golden Toad (pictured here), native to Costa Rica. It has not been seen since 1989, when a single male was found, the last of its species.

We grieve the Pyrenean Ibex (pictured here). The last of this species naturally born was a female, Celia, who died in 2000.

We grieve the St. Helena Olive, a small spreading tree, the last of which perished in 2003 primarily due to deforestation and invasive plants.

We grieve all our extinct brother and sister species, the amphibians, fish, birds, mammals, plants and trees, and their diminished habitats.

We grieve the humans whose sustenance and livelihoods are threatened by this disruption in the food web.

We grieve the deaths of ecological martyrs: Sister Dorothy Stang, Dian Fossey, Chico Mendes, and the over 900 other activists slain since 2004. (Global Witness)

* Listen to and/or Sing: "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?" Perhaps for v. 2 and 3: species, workers. (If needed, Joan Baez' version: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0LZ2R2zW2Yc.)

* Extinguish first candle. Light second candle. It honors the threatened species that remain and our desire to protect them.

* Quiet reflection:

For believers, our faith is tested by our concern and care for creation. U. S. Catholic Bishops: "Renewing the Earth" 1991
* Watch
How wolves renewed Yellowstone Park:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh_fdfIPyDg.

Litany of Gratitude and Hope

We are grateful that 90% of species under the protection of the Endangered Species Act (U.S.) are recovering at the rate specified by their federal recovery plan.

We are grateful that British oil company Soco International agreed (June 2014) to suspend exploration in a national park in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), home to half the world's critically endangered mountain gorillas (pictured here) and thousands of other species. We thank the over 750,000 people who signed a petition to stop the oil drilling.

We are grateful that the Zoological Society of London released its list of birds most at risk of extinction based on evolutionary distinctness and global endangerment (EDGE) in April 2014. This information will help conservationists decide where efforts should focus first.

We are grateful that the population of the California Least Tern (pictured here), listed as endangered in 1970, grew from 225 recorded then to 6,568 recorded in 2010.

We are grateful for all of the habitats that have been saved so the interdependent species within them can escape extinction.

We are grateful for the many people throughout the world who dedicate their time and efforts to keeping habitats and species alive so they can give praise to their creator by their distinct lineages, attributes, and contributions to the web of life.

Action Suggestions

* Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations. Pope Francis

To save species, we must save ecosystems. To save ecosystems, we must reduce climate change, pollution, poaching, invasive species, and over-consumption. Mentally check the things on p. 4 that you already do for this. There might be something else there that you would want to do.

* Read quietly:
Consciously deepen appreciation of the glory of creation, its long story, the place of Divine Mystery in it, and humans' dependence upon it. Pray for the healing of creation.

Reduce all energy use. Transition to renewable energy sources (for electricity).

Encourage institutions to invest in renewable energy and to divest from fossil fuels.

Drive less and/or reduce gas use by not exceeding 60 mph on the highways (and other ways).

Avoid produce, meat, and poultry from factory farms. Buy recycled products.

Reduced use of plastic. Carry water in a thermos (not bottled water). Buy local.

Avoid genetically modified foods (GMOs). Lobby for laws to protect habitats and species.

Include Earth-care concerns when choosing legislators.

Join (or cooperate with) a group working to conserve, restore and protect habitats and species.

* Discuss: Einstein said: *Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge points to all that is*. *Imagination points to all that could be*. What kind of Earth "could be"? How can we contribute to co-creating it?

**Sending Forth**

Great Giver of Life, we come from, and we dwell in, the magnificent world in which you live and act. Our species is causing extinctions; our species can prevent them. Let us not be thwarted by the immensity of the challenge, for the Power working within us can do more than we could ask or imagine. May the flame of this candle continue burning in our hearts, reminding us to help our threatened relatives.

* Extinguish second candle.

Enlighten us to find you in all Creation; empower us to treat it accordingly. Through Jesus Christ, whose respect for Earth inspires us to live as he did. Amen.

* Sing: "The Heavens Are Telling the Glory of God" or "Touch the Earth" (Kathy Sherman, C.S.J.) or another appropriate song

* Share a sign of hope with one another (or a sign of peace).

Terri MacKenzie, SHCJ   http://ecospiritualityresources.com   terrishcj@aol.com