

## A REFLECTION ON PS 103(4) AS A PRELUDE TO LAUDATO 'SI

**Good morning, and a very warm welcome to this week's Home Retreat on Ps 103(4). I have illustrated this psalm with a few slides and put Dvorak's Symphony called the New World as a background. You will find it among the Resources. You may be able to watch and listen to it afterwards, or even with this talk, played later.**

**Why have I chosen this psalm? It is a hymn on the glories of Creation and follows the sequence of the second Creation story in Gen 1. I felt it might be a fitting psalm to reflect upon in our time of Global Crisis. And we are surely in crisis over the management of our Planet Earth. The evidence heaps up daily, that we have treated our home with disdain, exploited it for our own advantage and are contributing to its destruction as a balanced system which has sustained life for millennia. Our attitude towards our Earth needs a drastic turn-around, and how better to begin that process than with this Psalm, and a reading of Laudato Si.**

Psalm 103

Bless the Lord, my soul!

Lord God, how great you are,  
clothed in majesty and glory,  
wrapped in light as in a robe!

**The whole being of the psalmist is engaged in the praise of God whom he sees all around him, wrapped in Light as in a robe – that light which not only enables us to see, but 'enlightens us with all the knowledge of God'. St. Augustine says: *"Some people, in order to discover God, read books. But there is a great book: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead, He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that?"* Yet there are so many in our world who neither see God around them, nor search for him.**

You stretch out the heavens like a tent.

Above the rains you build your dwelling.

You make the clouds your chariot,  
you walk on the wings of the wind,

you make the winds your messengers  
and flashing fire your servants.

You founded the earth on its base,  
to stand firm from age to age.

**In poetic language, the psalmist sees above us the tent of the heavens, and somewhere the very dwelling of God beyond our eyes, yet you are there in motion with the clouds, walking on the wings of the wind, conveying messages of hope, accompanied with fire which both enlivens and destroys. The earth itself seemed so stable and so firm to our Ancestors. Today we have seen it in perspective from the realms of Space, a beautiful but tiny planet in the multitude of heavenly bodies, fragile and threatened by our gross mismanagement.**

You wrapped it with the ocean like a cloak:  
the waters stood higher than the mountains.

At your threat they took to flight;  
at the voice of your thunder they fled.

They rose over the mountains and flowed down  
to the place which you had appointed.

You set limits they might not pass  
lest they return to cover the earth.

You make springs gush forth in the valleys:  
they flow in between the hills.

They give drink to all the beasts of the fields;  
the wild-asses quench their thirst.

On their banks dwell the birds of heaven;  
from the branches they sing their song.

From your dwelling you water the hills;  
earth drinks its fill of your gift.

**Once covered in water like a cloak, it was from these waters all life evolved.**

Water seems the theme in this part of the psalm and at your word it revealed earth and mountains, continents and islands. The seas have their limits. Rivers flow through the valleys and between the hills, giving abundant life to beasts and birds, let alone the thirsty earth which drinks its fill.

And yet, our greed and exploitation has threatened the waters of the earth, causing sea to rise once more and flood the islands, encouraged desertification where water is so scarce, or massive rainfall which causes flooding. As it says in Laudato Si:

**Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply. Some countries have areas rich in water while others endure drastic scarcity. We have upset the balance of the earth.**

You make the grass grow for the cattle  
and the plants to serve man's needs,  
that he may bring forth bread from the earth  
and wine to cheer man's heart;  
oil, to make his face shine  
and bread to strengthen man's heart.

The trees of the Lord drink their fill,  
the cedars he planted on Lebanon;  
there the birds build their nests:  
on the tree-top the stork has her home.

The goats find a home on the mountains  
and rabbits hide in the rocks.

**Abundant grass and foliage feed the great variety of wild and domestic creatures. We humans, too, depend on the waters to grow our crops. We bring forth every variety of food to feed ourselves with bread, to make merriment with wine and to use oil for health and vigour. And yet there is famine in our world, where some have no variety, and others starve. Rich nations waste the foods produced. Land and animals are exploited for our meat, while some who are poor have never tasted meat or wine or oil.**

**Your marvels of nature are interdependent, serving each other's needs. The Cedars of Lebanon, the birds of the air, the goats in the mountains, the coney in the rocks – all dependent on the God of Creation. Trees as we know, transpire and provide our oxygen, reducing greenhouse gases and purifying our air. The Forests are the lungs of our Planet. Yet we slash and burn, displacing indigenous peoples, harvesting the wood, and changing the use of the land.**

You make the moon to mark the months;  
the sun knows the time for its setting.

When you spread the darkness it is night  
and all the beasts of the forest creep forth.

The young lions roar for their prey  
and ask their food from God.

At the rising of the sun they steal away  
and go to rest in their dens.

Man goes forth to his work,  
to labour till evening falls.

**Even the great Lights, the heavenly bodies are subject to you; there to mark months and years., time and seasons, high days and holidays. The darkness for beasts to creep forth, to roar for their prey, asking their food from God. This daytime for humans to work and labour till evening falls. Today, we battle with light pollution, working all hours to raise production. We have obscured the beauty of the stars!**

How many are your works, O Lord!

In wisdom you have made them all.

The earth is full of your riches.

There is the sea, vast and wide,  
with its moving swarms past counting,  
living things great and small.

The ships are moving there  
and the monsters you made to play with.

All of these, look to you  
to give them their food in due season.  
You give it, they gather it up:  
you open your hand, they have their fill.  
You hide your face, they are dismayed;  
you take back your spirit, they die,  
returning to the dust from which they came.  
You send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the earth.

**There is an abundance and variety in all your works, formed and evolved in your wisdom, and the earth full of your riches.**

**The sea like another world, teeming with life of every kind, a highway for ships plying their trade, discovering far distant lands, encountering the monsters you play with. The earth is indeed full of your riches, yet in our greed, they are not shared equally among us, they are not shared with our own kind, let alone with all creatures. We have polluted the sea, filling it with plastic waste, exploiting its fish stocks, butchering the whales. And yet we watch avidly, the programmes on Nature and wonder at its harmony and detail.**

**You are generous in your creation and all is gift. In contrast we are mean. We feed with our eye on economic gain. We use your gifts for profit, for control and the exercise of power.**

**Yet all creatures are part of the cycle of life and death, we perish and die, and return to the earth from which we came. You renew the face of the earth through your Spirit and breath of life and You ordained for new species to evolve.**

**But the domination by our species has threatened the delicate balance of the earth. Species are disappearing at alarming speed, no longer to be renewed. We seem to have no real desire to share our planet with your diversity, which is such an expression of your glory!**

May the glory of the Lord last for ever!

May the Lord rejoice in his works!

He looks on the earth and it trembles;  
the mountains send forth smoke at his touch.

I will sing to the Lord all my life,  
make music to my God while I live.

May my thoughts be pleasing to him.

I find my joy in the Lord.

**Despite all we are doing, the glory of the Lord will last forever – may You rejoice in all your works. That includes ourselves, if only we lived in harmony with nature and with God. The earth now trembles in its agony, the mountains and forests are ablaze, as the earth warms and temperatures rise, not directly by Your hand, but by our contribution.**

**This is where we should be in our relationship with our God. Finding joy in the Lord and the Lord in us. To sing to the Lord all my life, make music to my God while I live.**

Let sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked exist no more.

Bless the Lord, my soul!

**Would that selfishness vanish from the earth, so that all peoples, nations and languages may find harmony and peace.**

**Let my soul bless the Lord, ending as we began with the Psalmist.**

**Thank you for listening. I hope you can play the power-point during the day and try your own reflection on the Psalm.**