

### SPRING: A LIFEFORCE OF RENEWAL

*Humankind has not woven the web of life.  
We are but one thread within it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves.  
All things are bound together.  
All things connect (1854).*

These words from Chief Seattle, leader of the Suquamish and Duwamish people, reveal the richness of the wisdom of the Indigenous nations of what is now North America. The understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and the need for ecological responsibility weighed heavily on the hearts and minds of Indigenous peoples as they saw the impact of European settlement on their homelands. As Cree prophecy warns:

*When all the trees have been cut down,  
when all the animals have been hunted,  
when all the waters are polluted,  
when all the air is unsafe to breathe,  
only then will you discover you cannot eat money.*  
([www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom](http://www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom))

The great wisdom figures of the North American Indigenous nations would have much in common with Pope Francis who asserts in *Laudato Si* (2015) that *'... the entire material universe speaks of God's love ... soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God (N84)*. Leaders like Chief Luther Standing Bear reinforce this understanding of the Divine Spirit at the heart of all creation:

*From Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and through all things – the flowers of the plains, blowing winds, rocks, trees, birds, animals – and was the same force that had been breathed into the first man (1995, p. 40).*

In her book *Great Quotations: Native American Words of Wisdom* (1995) Martin includes many examples of the wisdom of the Indigenous Nations and their

leaders, following is a small selection:

- *... lack of respect for growing, living things soon leads to a lack of respect for humans too (Chief Luther Standing Bear. p.38).*
- *You must speak straight so that your words may go as sunlight into our hearts (Cochise. P.24).*
- *It does not require many words to speak the truth (Chief Joseph. p.6).*
- *To us the ashes of our ancestors are sacred, and their resting place is hallowed ground. (Chief Seattle. p19).*

It is amazing to think that these words from peoples who were at the time regarded as uncivilised, have so much to offer our world today. There is an emphasis on being rather than having, on relationships rather than hierarchies, on gratitude rather than retaliation and anger, on the sacredness of creation rather than its potential for wealth and development.

There also exists a great congruence between the writings of our Franciscan founder St Francis himself, who spoke of nature as a wonderful book in which God speaks to us, and the writing of Chief Luther Standing Bear; between Pope Francis' reminder of the need for intergenerational solidarity *... the world we have received also belongs to those who follow us...* (*Laudato Si*, n159) and the Indigenous American proverb: *...treat the Earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children* ([www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom](http://www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom)).

The spirituality of the Indigenous Nations of North America is infused and enriched with the understanding of the interconnectedness of life and it provides great inspiration for us as we strive to embrace the challenge of eco-spirituality presented by Pope Francis and the eco-mystics of our world. We finish this Mercy Moment with an Earth Prayer for the Season of Creation which begins today (1 September - 4 October).

Photo by Fabien Burgue from Pexels

#### *Earth, Teach Me*

*Earth teach me quiet, as the grasses are still with new light.  
Earth teach me humility, as blossoms are humble with beginning.  
Earth teach me caring, as mothers nurture their young.  
Earth teach me courage, as the tree that stands alone.  
Earth teach me acceptance, as the leaves that die each fall.  
Earth teach me renewal, as the seed that rises in the spring.*

(Excerpts from the Ute Prayer: [www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom](http://www.inspirationfortheSpirit.com/native-american-wisdom)).

**REFLECTION:** How can you celebrate this Season of Creation in your ministry?

**RESOURCES:** Martin, P. (1995). *Ancient Echoes: Native American Words of Wisdom*. United States: Great Quotations Publishing Inc.; Francis. (2015) *Laudato Si': On Care For Our Common Home*. Strathfield, NSW: St Paul's Publications.

We acknowledge and pay respect to the traditional owners of the lands on which our ministries exist and the Elders both past and present on whose land we walk, work and live.