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Where is Easter for those on the cross?

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Were you among the more than 1 million viewers who went to YouTube last week to see the story of Fiona, a blind, stray mixed-breed poodle whose owner abandoned her at a garbage heap in south Los Angeles? If so, you probably wept and rejoiced, just as I did.

Eldad and Audrey Hagar, directors of Paws for Hope, a local 8-year-old humane group, learned of the pup's plight last June through a friend's phone alert. A video made that day shows them rescuing the pitiful, trembling animal. She is starving, scraggily, flea-infested and covered in filth. The couple bathes and feeds her. They seek veterinary help. Can her vision be restored? Dr. Michael Chang, an ophthalmic veterinarian, assures them he can fix one of her eyes so she can have partial sight.

The Hagars post a plea for help from their supporters. Within four days, good-hearted people contributed $4,000 for the surgery. A follow-up video shows a transformed Fiona. She has turned into a happy puppy, cuddling with her new adoptive family -- the family she can actually see.

Last week, Eldad Hagar edited the two videos he had made into one about Fiona's progress and reposted them to raise awareness about the suffering of stray animals.

His timing couldn't have been better. Fiona's is an Easter story.

Hagar's video inspires the question: Why are there are so many crucifixions in our modern world and not enough resurrections? If I were a poet, I could frame my grief much more compellingly. But instead I will have to settle for simple prose.

An act of compassion lifted Fiona from the cross of a garbage dump, blindness and the prospect of a miserable death. The downside: There are still 30,000 starving dogs -- and how many cats? -- wandering the streets of Los Angeles, but people seem oblivious, Hagar said.

What about the overabundance of other crucifixions in our suffering world?

The indigenous people of the Niger Delta in Nigeria do not have enough to eat because oil refineries have poisoned their fishing grounds and crops. Young pregnant women who try to clean up some of the mess miscarry.

In the United States, thousands of people suffer from multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. Are the scourges of environmental toxic pollutions responsible? Where is the healing Easter in their lives?

So many youngsters and their families carry the mental pain from sexual abuse and the deprivations brought about by homelessness. There don't seem to be enough Easters to go around for them, either.

Across our advanced, wealthy technological world, shoppers mindlessly acquire more stuff. Some of it is made from fossil-fuel plastic, wrapped in unsustainable paper packaging. Many bargain-hunters don't seem to realize

the burdens they place on the earth's fragile natural resources because of their "more" mentalities. When will the plundered earth and stripped-away rainforests have their Easter mornings of resurrection?

Charity Sr. Paula Gonzalez has some ideas for us. She spoke of them during the Earthkeeping Summit sponsored by Ohio Interfaith Power and Light held March 31 at Ohio State University in Columbus. Gonzalez, a longtime environmental spirituality educator from Cincinnati, presented two afternoon sessions on spirituality for the 21st century.

The basis for her talks and PowerPoint presentations was the Earth Charter, a United Nations-sponsored document crafted between 1995-2000 by world leaders from the fields of world religions, science, philosophy and ecology. Its mission is to promote a global transition to sustainability founded on respect, love, compassion and care for the community of earth and life in all its diversity.

Gonzalez invited us to see the Earth Charter as a prayer we need to practice. Its message -- urging us toward awe, gratitude, asceticism, prophecy and humility -- forms the perfect setting for a contemplative state of mind, she said.

Sometimes people get funny about the word contemplation, she said, but all it means is to be in touch with our surroundings.

So what would it be like, Gonzalez asked, if we would pay attention to the words of Meister Eckhart, a medieval German Dominican mystic, when he said "that every simple creature, even a caterpillar, is a word, a book about God."

She tied in his observation with French Jesuit scientist and mystic Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's words that "for those who know how to see, nothing is profane. Everything is sacred."

One of the photos in her PowerPoint showed our planet in the shape of a heart. Gonzalez said she thought it would be a good idea if we took the image as a spiritual practice.

"We have to start functioning with our hearts," she said.

What would happen, she asked, "if we started reverencing and reconstituting everything in the community of life from a heart perspective? Why, I believe we would have ecological integrity, social and economic justice, democracy, non-violence and peace. Doesn't this sound like heaven?"

Gonzalez acknowledged her own sorrow over the widespread global misery.

"I hurt about the polar bears going extinct in Alaska," she said. "I hurt about the fracking here in Ohio."

She ended her remarks by expressing solidarity with the words of feminist poet Adrienne Rich, who died last week.

> "My heart is moved by all I cannot save.
>
> I have to cast my lot with those who age after age, persevere, and with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world."

The planet, she said, will go on without us, but if we choose to stay on it, we will have to become caring global citizens, limiting our consumption and supporting energy changes.

"Our culture is adolescent," she said. "We have to decide whether we want to be adults."

Ecological adulthood will mean becoming painfully aware of the Fionas of the world, fracking, dying rainforests, polluted rivers, endangered species and the suffering people around us, all on their rows of crosses. Are we willing to become Easter for them?

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