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Heavenly waters await New York's 'Neurotic Polar Bear'

Megan Fincher | Aug. 29, 2013 Eco Catholic

New York City and visitors to the Central Park Zoo lost their ?Neurotic Polar Bear? Tuesday night.

Earlier in the day, veterinarians discovered Gus, 27, had an inoperable tumor in his thyroid region and euthanized him [1] later that evening. In the wild, the average polar bear lives just shy of 21 years, according to the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

What was his claim to fame? Like a typical New Yorker, Gus just couldn?t stop. During his 25 years at the zoo, tens of millions of people lined up to see Gus swim laps ? for up to 12 hours a day, every day. Also known as the bi-polar bear (get it?), the zoo eventually hired an animal behaviorist to cure Gus? woes. The psychiatrist concluded that Gus was bored.

At 1,000 pounds, Gus lived in an enclosure described as [2] ?a rocky expanse containing a waterfall, some ice, and 90,000 gallons of freshwater. The water is 10 feet deep ? Each bear has a den with air conditioning to help get through the hottest days.?

In contrast, according to the nonprofit, Zoocheck Canada, a wild polar bear?s territory can extend to 116,000 square miles [3], and they have the stamina to swim 60 miles in the ocean without rest.

Given his mental strain from living in the middle of a city, it seems ironic that Gus received gifts of toys like ?rubber garbage cans and traffic cones,? according to the *New York Times* [4]. The newspaper also reported that zookeepers started to make meal time more challenging, offering ?mackerel frozen in ice, chicken wrapped in rawhide ? to keep his mind and body more active.?

The therapy worked to an extent, but his obsessive swimming never stopped entirely.

Many people have wondered if Pope Francis, given his namesake, will advocate for animals and the environment. During World Youth Day, Francis spoke of protecting the Amazon Basin [5], asking for ?respect and protection of the entire creation which God has entrusted to man, not so that it be indiscriminately exploited but rather made into a garden.?

I have a soft spot for Pope Francis, and I imagine he would not have laughed and cheered at Gus? plight.

?All the families of the earth? have been entrusted with God?s creation, and in Genesis 1: 26, God asks everyone to ?rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, the whole earth, and every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.?

As Jacques Ellul so eloquently clarifies in his book *On Freedom, Love, and Power*, ?Humanity is called to dominate over the fish and the birds, etc., except that this role of domination is like the one God exercises over the creation. ? Humanity is called to rule within the image of God. ? As God rules over the world, not by his power but in and through love, so humanity is given to rule in and through love.?

I hope Gus is swimming in a heavenly ocean right now, with St. Francis swimming alongside.

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