

A sea of glass

I listened to Irish local radio on Tuesday morning at 5 a.m. while I answered some of my emails. My ears perked up when I heard the following texted message being read on the air. It stated, “would the person who dumped the dead sheep in the peat bog at _____, please return and take it away and dispose of it in the proper manner. We want to let you know that we saw you dumping the dead sheep and we have your car tag number.”

I’m not sure if the texted message got any response or if the culprit heard the message and, because of guilt pangs, decided to return and dispose of the dead sheep in the proper manner. I also wondered if the person who texted the message did in fact have the car tag of the culprit or was it a threat to impose some more guilt feelings on the culprit.

I filed the story in the back of my mind as I went for my usual 3 a.m. bike ride the next morning. The new daylight type lights along the beach guided me to Washington Avenue where I would detour onto the bike and walking track.

As I rode onto the track, I noticed it sprayed ahead of it. It was too late to renegotiate a safer path. The shattered remains of a dark brown beer bottle lay exposed. I listened for the crunch beneath my tires as I hoped and prayed for a miracle. Somehow, miraculously, I didn’t hear the sudden gush of air exiting from any of the tires and I felt relieved so I peddled on.

Thinking about my narrow escape, I had noticed that the glass was a sea of small pieces. I concluded that someone driving along the beach and drinking a beer decided to unload the empty bottle by throwing it onto the path where it shattered into hundreds of pieces.

I continued on. Some four miles later, I noticed some glistening glass pellets ahead in the dim light. I did some maneuvers to escape but I still heard the crunch under my tires. Again, I hoped and prayed for another miracle. Of course, I didn’t want to entertain the thought of having to walk four miles home pushing a bike with two flat tires. This time, again, I was in luck.

Mentally, I made note of the two glass strewn places so I could maneuver around them on my return trip. As I got closer to each, I dismounted my bike and, with my shoes, tried to gather the fragments of glass into one pile in each place. I also hoped that some environmentally conscious dog walker might happen upon the sites and, with their poop-patrol equipment, scoop up the glass so that it would not pose a hazard to any other walker or biker.

At a time when we are more environmentally conscious, it saddens us that people still continue to desecrate God’s garden. We notice empty beer bottles left on footpaths by churches following weddings. We notice some people who decide to clean out their car’s ash tray in some parking lot or even in a church parking lot.

The story of Creation is a reminder that everything God created is good. God also took the time on the seventh day to sit back, relax, enjoy and admire the results of his creative genius.

All creation is a blessing, a gift from the Creator which, if allowed, intoxicates us with love for the handwork of the Master. Pope John Paul II challenged us as humans to find our “ecological vocation.” Even Albert Einstein challenged humans to take responsibility for the creativity of nature when he said, “A man is truly ethical only when he obeys the compulsion to help all life which he is able to assist, and shrinks from injuring anything that lives....Life is sacred to him.”

One of the great pioneers of ecological awareness and challenge was Jesuit Fr. Thomas Berry, Catholic priest, cultural historian and ecotheologian, who died last year. He said, “We come here because we too feel a responsibility for the human community. To preserve and develop a human quality of life is the common responsibility of us all. It is not fitting that those concerned with the various aspects of the human be alienated from each other. Both you and ourselves represent forces too profound and aim at objectives too significant for either of us to succeed completely without the assistance of the other. The urgency of our work impels us to get on with our common task lest a new period of disaster erupt over the Earth.”

Tomorrow morning, I will hope for a clean and stress-free ride courtesy of some far-visioned and committed ecologically minded person taking care of a patch of God’s greatest garden.