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APRIL 22, which falls on a Friday this year, was designated as Earth Day in 1970. This was to raise awareness about environmental issues and remind people that we all need to do our part in making Mother Earth a better place to live in, by keeping it healthy and sustainable.

Last March 19, we observed “Earth Hour,” a symbolic gesture participated in by more than 150 countries, during which we simultaneously switched off electric power for one hour, not only in solidarity with the millions of people all over the world who are still without electricity, but also—and especially—to educate the modern world about technology and material progress as they affect or enhance the environment.

In November 2015, an international conference on global warming was held in Paris. The program it came up with for the defense of the environment is simple: “Think globally and act locally” through proper waste management and by saving on water and the use of fuel; and by recycling and curbing consumerism and materialism by acting on the adage, “Live simply that others may simply live.”

Support of and protection of Mother Earth, our only home, is the topic of the 2015 apostolic letter “*Laudato Si.*” In that document, Pope Francis underlined the problems facing the environment, their causes and how we can help heal our planet, as individuals and in collective ways.

It was not a random choice that the Pope took the name of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron of ecology. St. Francis was tasked to “Repair the House of God” which was widely interpreted to be not just the institutional Church but wherever God is—in the human community and in the whole of creation. Among the issues Pope Francis alluded to in the document “*Misericordiae Vultus*” (The Face of Mercy), which proclaims 2016 as the Year of Mercy, was that, if we are to show mercy to one another, we should not neglect to show mercy to the environment.

With the forthcoming national elections, the issue of the environment should be topmost in the platforms of local and national candidates. The candidates’ former and current positions on the environment should be revealed and evaluated. The voters must be made aware of the significance of the issue. The environment must be an important focus because all other promises and programs about material progress, technology, jobs, education, etc. would be moot and academic in a devastated natural environment.

After the elections, the voters should monitor and take to task those who are elected should they violate their commitment to the environment. Our “Bantay Kalikasan” (Guardians of Nature), at the local, regional and national levels, should make sure that elected officials do as they promised.

Let us celebrate this year’s Earth Day not just with external actions but also with a prayer—for us to be aware of what it is that we have done to cause the deterioration of Mother Earth, and of what we can and should do to repair the damage we have caused the environment. Thus, will we be able to show our gratitude to the Supreme Lord and Creator who gave us this blessing and express our commitment to work on healing our only home.

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