

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen

In our Gospel lesson, our translation says... **“the earth produces of itself”**

But the actual word in Greek is “automatos”

And it comes at the beginning of the sentence, not at the end.

So more literally, the sentence reads: Automatically, the earth produces....

Now we know the word “automatic”

Often we associate it with gadgets and technology

Some of you might remember the old ...Horn & Hardett...restaurants

They were the first to come out with automatic food dispensing machines.

When we think of “automatic” we think of “automated”

We think of instruments and machines that will make our lives better.

We think of new technologies that will service us and meet our immediate needs.

We often look at the world around us from that same perspective.

We look at things from the perspective of how they can benefit us.

How they can make our lives better.

Often, we even deal with God and with God’s creation from that standpoint.

We will take and use and abuse God’s creation as long as it serves to meet “my needs” and provide for “my family”

Even with all the renewed interest in “going green”, we still often make daily decisions that affect God’s world based on what is most beneficial and convenient for ourselves.

Interesting that the word “automatic” literally means “self-moving or self-thinking”

But in the context of this passage, the auto....the self” refers to the earth.

It refers to God’s creation

The self in this text does not refer to us....to me or to you.

In fact, throughout the Scriptures, we find that most of the time that we humans get ourselves into trouble it has something to do with us thinking only about ourselves.

Here’s a little story by Martha Hills that might make my point a little clearer...

It’s a little conversation between God and St. Francis:

GOD: Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, thistle and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds.

I expected to see a vast garden of colors by now. But, all I see are these green rectangles.

St. FRANCIS: It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers "weeds" and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

GOD: Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colorful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees; only grubs and sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

GOD: The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

ST. FRANCIS: Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it – sometimes twice a week.

GOD: They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

ST. FRANCIS: Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

GOD: They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

ST. FRANCIS: No, Sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

GOD: Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow, and, when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

ST. FRANCIS: Yes, Sir.

GOD: These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

ST. FRANCIS: You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

GOD: What nonsense. Well, at least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a

natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. It's a natural cycle of life.

St. FRANCIS: You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

GOD: No. What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

ST. FRANCIS: After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

GOD: And where do they get this mulch?

ST. FRANCIS: They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

GOD: Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. Let's think about tonight's movie. What do we have on the schedule?

ST. Francis. "Dumb and Dumber", Lord. It's a story about....

GOD: Never mind. I think you just told me that whole story.

How often we deal with God's abundant creation from our own self-centered perspective!

All of us are guilty of this from time to time. (in fact, I laughed when I found this story, because after I decided to use it, I realized that presently there is a big old pile of mulch sitting in my driveway.)

How often we deal with God's abundant creation from our own self-centered perspective!

What is God doing for me?

How can these resources benefit me?

How will these things make my life easier?

And because of that perspective, we often lose sight of God's intent for creation and for us, as part of that creation.

The text says: **The earth produces of itself**....automatically.....self-moving..

The "self" refers to the whole creation as a system.

God does not provide the earth's resources simply for my personal good or your personal good.

Instead God provides for the good of all creation, of which each of us is only a small part.

God provides everything that is needed for creation to thrive, but too often we think we know better,

so we alter it or waste it, or try to improve upon what God has given.

Too often we take control of God's resources as if they belong exclusively to us.

In the parable, the sower is not in control of the seed.

He goes to sleep and *automatically*, the seed sprouts and grows.

In fact, not only does he not have control,
He doesn't even know how it happens.

Automatically the seed grows

Automatically the ground produces

Automatically the earth recreates itself

Automatically God provides for the good of all.

How often do we think about that?

How often do we teach this concept to our children?

that... this earth, these resources, even our very lives are not ours to alter or waste.

It all belongs to God.

We are merely stewards.

We are managers of what, has always and will always, belong to God.

God generously allows us to use what is *automatically* provided..
not just for our own needs, but for the benefit and longevity of the whole creation.

and that's actually really good news.

That God *automatically* provides for us.

Not because we do anything to deserve it,
but because God is the benevolent Creator of all things.

Regardless of our behavior or our understanding or our input,

Automatically, God continues to provide for us.

In fact, that is the whole salvation story in a nutshell:

Automatically, through God's creating power we have been given life.

Automatically, through Christ's redeeming power we have been given new life.

Automatically, through the Spirit's recreating power, we continue to grow along with
all living things.

Until that day, when *automatically*, God will make all things new and all of creation
will be restored to a wholeness and equity that we have not yet seen in this world.

And although our response to this amazing gift of salvation is not quite as *automatic* as
God's,

We **are** called to respond.

If it can't be *automatic*, then at least we can try for "intentional"

1. How will you be intentional about caring for the earth this week?

2. What is one intentional change you can make in your daily pattern that will make you a better steward this week?

3. How can you intentionally help your children understand that everything we have belongs and comes from God?

May the *automatic* love, nurture, and care of God, bless you and keep you in his grace.
Amen