

## **St. Louis Review**

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### **Hunting: God's gift is good for the body, soul — and the table**

By Fr. Joe Classen

In the “green” days of political correctness, environmental activism and animal rights, the American legacy of hunting is coming under more scrutiny than ever. There are many concerns in our culture for animal welfare, and a more “humane” way of living. The idea of armed, camouflage-clad individuals taking to the woods in search of their quarry is abhorred by those whose fantasy view of the natural world is based on the subjective, feel-good nonsense of Disney movies and the like.

Indeed, there is a tremendous amount of misinformation about hunting these days, about its purpose and value as well as the laughable stereotypes of those who hunt and fish. There is the incredibly mistaken notion that we hunters are crazed murderers who have a sick fascination with destroying life. Unfortunately, there are people who fit that description: They are called poachers, and they are criminals!

But for those of us who passionately love hunting and all things outdoors, absolutely nothing could be further from the truth. Hunters are the first and truest environmentalists. We are the greenest of the green.

Hunters are not mere spectators of creation, as other nature lovers are. Rather, we are active participants as we immerse ourselves completely into God's creation and take a hands-on role in managing our natural, renewable resources, of which animals are a big part.

The very existence of wildlife and the preservation of millions of acres of habitat are the direct result of the work and funding of hunters. It's not out of selfishness so that we can have more things to kill, as some would say. Our concern flows from a hyper-awareness of the intrinsic, life-sustaining and soul-nourishing value of these great gifts. In fact, the birth of the National Parks was a result of an immensely experienced, passionate hunter — President Theodore Roosevelt.

To address the biggest misconception concerning hunters, we do not “kill for pleasure.” There is a huge difference between the satisfaction of a successful hunt (which takes tremendous preparation and skill) and some sort of sick pleasure in taking life. A true hunter understands the paradox of such. Certainly, it is not fun to watch the spark of life dwindle away from a creature's eye, knowing that one is directly responsible for its death. But at the same time there exists a satisfaction, and yes, a sense of honor in being an active, disciplined, gracious, responsible and respectful participant in the cycle of life.

While some in our culture consider themselves morally superior because of the popular eco-friendly lifestyle they have adopted, they completely overlook the fact that unless they eat dirt and live in a dirt hut, they are responsible for killing and using living things. Every time one goes to the grocery store or a restaurant, he has paid someone else to end

the life of a living creature for his use and benefit. At the same time he has totally disconnected himself from the governing rule of life on Earth — that something must die for something else to live. Even most vegans and vegetarians turn a blind eye to the fact that truckloads of animals are killed in the process of raising their vegetables.

Hunters know firsthand the price their food has paid. They foster a sense of the sacred in what they do, what they eat: The land that supports their food and the God who created it. Other natural predators are not so thoughtful or kind. Neither is Mother Nature, who slowly and painfully thins the herd with disease, starvation, over-browsing, habitat destruction and predation.

Catholics should realize that our Church teaches that mankind is the steward of creation and that we have the God-given responsibility to use (not abuse), to protect and to cherish those gifts. Hunting is as natural and healthy as breathing the air that keeps us alive. There is simply no reason to apologize for becoming an active, respectful and considerate participant in the natural world and putting food on the table by one's own efforts.

While achieving those things brings great satisfaction, the actual act of hunting itself becomes a catalyst for taking a front-row seat to the most beautiful, wild and awe-inspiring places that our Lord has made, while providing the time to get to know Him much more intimately. That, in turn, enriches every aspect of our lives. Ah, yes, hunting — good for body and the soul.

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