

# The moral gusher

May 26, 2010

I started praying for mud when BP officials announced they would attempt a "top kill" procedure to plug a wrecked oil well almost a mile beneath the Gulf of Mexico's surface. Engineers began pumping mud into the well, hoping to stop the flow of crude. So far, at least [19 million gallons](#) of oil have gushed into the Gulf.

This is a tragedy of epic proportions. Already, it's the [worst oil spill](#) in U.S. history, and nobody knows how bad it get be before it's over.

News and [photos](#) about the spill are disheartening. Our family particularly resonates with this disaster, because we have spent some of the best, happiest weeks of our lives vacationing on the Gulf Coast. Imagining those pristine white beaches spoiled by crude and tar and dead sea animals is harrowing.

## **Epic tragedy**

And yet we know our sense of sorrow is miniscule by comparison. The families whose livelihood depends upon the Gulf—who catch fish and shrimp, who feed and house tourists, and who, ironically, drill for oil—could be scarred for years and even decades. In already-perilous economic times, some may lose their livelihoods and find themselves forced to flee inland.

Beyond that, the loss of marine life and waterfowl, marshlands and coasts is incomprehensible. The Deepwater Horizon catastrophe has violated God's creation, and that is a sin of enormous magnitude.

From the start, we've heard blame and seen fingers pointing. This, too, is dispiriting. It serves no useful purpose, since the intention is not to find and fix problems but to mitigate legal damage and score political points.

## **Plenty of guilt**

Truth is, guilt abounds in every direction. According to news reports, all the petroleum-producing companies involved in the Deepwater Horizon cut corners, ignored regulations, disregarded the safety of workers and just plain failed to do their jobs.

They were abetted by lax regulators, who apparently cozied up to the very industry they pledged to oversee. It's ironic that so many people want deregulation and yet they're surprised when unregulated or barely regulated industries create calamities of epic proportions.

## **Look inward**

The list of fault goes on and on. But we miss the point if we fail to look in the mirror.

- Oil companies can afford to spend billions of dollars to build and operate fleets of deep-sea drilling rigs because of our ravenous thirst for oil. They know we'll drive them to profits, one tank of gas at a time.
- They can afford to risk the lives of their employees because of our ravenous thirst for oil. They know we'll get more upset if we have to wait in line at the gas station than we will when we read about 11 lives lost on a single rig.
- They can afford to destroy the Gulf's fragile ecosystem, maul the Mississippi delta's rich marshes, and bedraggle beautiful beaches because of our ravenous thirst for oil. They know we'll eventually forgive them as long as we don't have to pay too much at the pump.
- Regulators can cash in on perks and other favors from the industries they allegedly regulate, because of our ravenous thirst for oil. Thanks to the cash we fork over at filling stations, the industries—not the people they'

regulators are supposed to protect—have all the power.

- Politicians can play the blame game, because of our ravenous thirst for oil. They know they'll confuse us with their excuses and fake us with their finger-pointing. And then, as long as they pump in enough campaign money from the industries they should be watching, they'll spend enough advertising money to get re-elected.

Until we as citizens of the Earth learn to simplify our lives, demand better fuel efficiency, call out and pay for greener energy, and hold business and government accountable, we'll continue to face one disaster after another.

Admittedly, this isn't easy. One petroleum expert estimates that if the Deepwater Horizon wreck spills 5,000 gallons of oil a day, that accounts for only [two minutes](#) of oil consumption in Texas.

So, in addition to praying that the mud will hold and the well will stop spewing, let us pray that this disaster will awaken a desire to be stewards of God's blessings. Let us pray that we will have the resolve to prevent a disaster like this from happening again—both by changing our habits and by insisting petroleum companies, regulators and politicians change theirs.