

Pope Francis reminds us that “Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth” (92). Pope Francis states that every single person on earth is connected by the very fact that we all inhabit the earth, which is our “common home.”

Franciscan theology permeates the encyclical. Pope Francis describes creation as creation *ex amore* (out of love), “God’s love is the fundamental moving force in all created things” (77). This is a shift from classical theology which says that the reason for creation either by divine freedom (Thomas Aquinas) or divine will (Bonaventure).

Laudato Si' presents creation as flowing forth from the heart of God in which every creature expresses God in some way. The world is created as a means of God’s self-revelation so that, like a mirror or footprint, it might lead us to love and praise the Creator. Francis of Assisi’s beautiful *Canticle of Creatures* frames this encyclical with a passion for wholeness and unity in the overflowing love of God. The Pope notes that the saint “was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself.”

Video clip: *All Creatures of our God and King*

The Gospel of creation

"Creating a world in need of development, God in some way sought to limit God's self in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which God uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator" (80).

Alongside revelation contained in Scripture, "there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night" (85). *Can you think of such an experience of the beauty of nature? (Short time of reflection then share in threes)*

Francis offers a rich reflection on the mystery of the universe. He says that creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of Father of all (76). We can ascend from created things to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy (77), and creation in the risen Christ continues onward until the fullness of God (83). In this universal communion, the human being, gifted with intelligence and personal identity, represents uniqueness (81). Human beings are responsible for the creation entrusted to their care and their freedom is a mystery that can promote development or cause degradation.

The human roots of the ecological crisis

Pope Francis locates the roots of the current ecological crisis within humanity. He cites especially those with the knowledge, and especially the economic resources to use them to become an impressive dominance over the whole of humanity and the entire world."

Francis says we are enthralled with a technocratic paradigm, which promises unlimited growth. But this paradigm "is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit." Those supporting this paradigm show "no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough."

Francis insists that "technological products are not neutral," (107, 114) that "the technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life" (109). He says, "We are all too slow in developing economic institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources"(109). By itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion" (109) and that "To seek only a technical remedy to each environmental

problem which comes up is to separate what is in reality interconnected and to mask the true and deepest problems of the global system" (111; "the present ecological crisis is one small sign of the ethical, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity" (119).

Francis calls for a broadened vision (112), "a bold cultural revolution" (114).

Small groups:

“Francis locates the roots of the current ecological crisis within humanity”. How does this “fit” with your understanding of the current situation and how do you feel about it? What can you do about it? Personally? Communally?

Integral Theology

Francis states clearly that we are not faced with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis that is both social and environmental.

Francis desires "an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature (139)". Francis says that it is important for us to understand ecosystems and our relationship to them (140).

"We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision" (141)

Climate as a common good

Francis cites studies supporting the theory of global warming and states that human activity is the primary driving force behind the phenomenon, as well as the main cause of species extinction. He also spoke of developed nations' obligations involving renewable resources and the development of poorer countries. He said that the earth "is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth "Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years."

Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. Its worst impact will probably be felt by developing countries in coming decades. 25. { Ref Boulevard}

Many of the poor live in areas particularly affected by phenomena related to warming, and their means of subsistence are largely dependent on natural reserves and ecosystemic services such as

agriculture, fishing and forestry. Francis says that many of those who possess more resources and economic or political power seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms, simply making efforts to reduce some of the negative impacts of climate change. However, many of these symptoms indicate that such effects will continue to worsen if we continue with current models of production and consumption. 26.

In contrast to the “exemplary” workings of natural ecosystems, he said, “we have not yet managed to adopt a circular model of production capable of preserving resources for present and future generations, while limiting as much as possible the use of non-renewable resources, moderating their consumption, maximizing their efficient use, reusing and recycling them.” 22

Some forms of pollution are part of people’s daily experience. Exposure to atmospheric pollutants produces a broad spectrum of health hazards, especially for the poor, and causes millions of premature deaths. 20. They are rooted in how we may corrupt those systems within a wider “culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest.” (184)

Discussion: *Climate change, its impacts and what we can do about managing its effects.*

Francis proposes a way forward

Francis says that the central solution to all this is not reworked political or economic ideologies - the answer is Jesus Christ and our relationships with Him, our neighbours, and the created order, which “is of the order of love.” (77) “When people become self-centred and self-enclosed, their greed increases.

The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. As these attitudes become more widespread, social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs. So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (204)

Some quiet reflective time on my attitude to a “a consumerist lifestyle”. What are some changes that I could make immediately?

Individualism

Pope Francis's examination of the human causes of environmental and social ills returns often to the problem of "rampant individualism" (162). This individualism is rooted in improper understanding of the nature, place, and final goal of the human person, who is made in the image of the Triune God. The Holy Father says that forgetting this reality of *who we are*—of Whose image we are made in—brings ruin to the Garden of life and the relationships that God gave us to care for. The consequences of all this are far reaching.

"When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities—to offer just a few examples—it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble." (117)

The call to dialogue—to right relationships with God, neighbour, and all creation—is a constant plea within *Laudato Si*.

How open am I to such dialogue?

Ecological conversion

216. The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious

contribution to make to the renewal of humanity. Here, Francis offers Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, ask myself “I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world?” A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity”.¹⁵¹ This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. 220.

It entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works: “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (*Mt* 6:3-4).

It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings.

Francis says that “an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable” (*Rom 12:1*)” 220.

Pope Francis suggests that “Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them.

So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.²²²

Have you a parish Eco group?

What aspects would you include in designing one?

SACRAMENTAL SIGNS

Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. For Christians, all the creatures

of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation. 235

The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle 238.

Concluding Prayer

A CHRISTIAN PRAYER IN UNION WITH CREATION

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your tender love.
Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.
Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.
Praise be to you!