

LAUDATO SI': ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Encyclical Letter

Pope Francis

Chapter Two: The Gospel of Creation

READ:

In this section, Pope Francis challenges all humanity to look at the biblical accounts that refer to humanity's responsibility for caring for all of creation. This, he says is a "tremendous responsibility" and we are expected to learn and understand that "the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone." (overview: page 164)

There are "three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships that ground human life." These have been broken within and outside of us:

1. our relationship with God (in all faiths and religions)
2. our relationship with our neighbor (which means every human being)
3. our relationship with the earth and all that it holds (p. 46) All creatures possess their own unique goodness and purpose in life, no matter how large or small. Everything is interconnected and we are called to reflect and mend the brokenness within ourselves, others, and all of creation in caring for our common home – Mother Earth.

The next important distinction that this encyclical makes is our incorrect interpretation of the translation in Genesis that refers to the word "dominion" over the earth. A more correct definition of the words in Genesis 2: 15 is that we are called to "till and keep" instead of have dominion over creation. "Till and keep" implies "a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature." (p. 49) "'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature." - Samantha Panchèvre

The meaning and practice of "Sabbath" beginning in Genesis, and then later in Exodus, and Leviticus is closely related to the need to repair our broken relationships with God, those who have been offended and also creation. This is to "ensure balance and fairness." (p.52) The Jewish people celebrate this in style through the concept of "Jubilee" when they celebrate a year of forgiveness and liberation for all the inhabitants. The God "who liberates and saves is the same God who created the universe, and these two divine ways of acting are intimately and inseparably connected." (p. 53)

In the third section of chapter two, Pope Francis points out that "creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things." This challenges us to not only love God, but to love God who lives IN people of every nation and all of creation. (p.55) This calls forth a responsibility in all of us to protect and care for every living being. "The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object. Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination." (p.57) "The entire material universe speaks of God's love, [God's] boundless affection for us...nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine." (p.59)

We have learned from St. Francis of Assisi in his “Hymn to the Universe” that “the Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship...” (p. 61) “All of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect.” (p. 62)

When we think of the word “communion” we are reminded of being one with Christ in the Eucharist. We are invited to be “in communion” with all of creation which is the Body of Christ. “Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society. Moreover, when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one.” (p. 63). This is our call, our Christian vocation. We are given the responsibility by our baptism and confirmation to promote peace and justice. As women and men of Providence, it is also our legacy from Bishop Ketteler. In his Advent Sermons of 1848, we learn about the issues of his day that are still with us today in the areas of Christian charity and social problems, human destiny and private property. These are touched again in this encyclical. “...the earth is essentially a shared inheritance...every ecological approach needs to incorporate a social perspective...the fundamental rights of the poor and the underprivileged. The principle of subordination of private property to the universal destination of goods, and thus the right of everyone to their use, is a golden rule of social conduct and ‘the first principle of the whole ethical and social order.’” (p. 64)

When we reflect on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, we see and learn that he was in full harmony with all of creation and with those shunned by the authority figures of his day. He stood with the forgotten, the “throw-a-ways” of his time. “In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of the universal Christ, present from the beginning: ‘All things have been created through Him and for Him.’” (Col. 1:16; p. 67-68) May this chapter give you guidance and hope for the future for all humanity and creation.

Reflect:

What does this chapter of *Laudato Si'* call forth in you? What emotions and feelings rise up within you? What will you reflect on in your private meditation time?

Act:

What changes, if any can you try to make within your living situation? What is rising up within you? Will your life change for the better or remain the same?

Closing Prayer:

Provident God, thank you for this time of information and reflection. Give me the courage to make a difference for the sake of our common home – Mother Earth. I pray this in the name of You, the Source of All Being, Eternal Word and Holy Spirit. Amen.