

LAUDATO SI': ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Encyclical Letter

Pope Francis

Chapter 1: What Is Happening To Our Common Home

Bishop Ketteler, in his first Advent Sermon spoke about the Christian View of Private Property. Ketteler said that "God and God alone is the ultimate and absolute owner of all things." (first Advent sermon) In this chapter of Laudato Si', Pope Francis builds on the issues that Bishop Ketteler and St. Thomas Aquinas addressed.

That is, change is becoming more rapid with evermore complex systems. At the same time, the biologic evolution continues at its slow deliberate pace. Change can be desirable but not at the expense of human beings and our earth. Pope Francis covers the challenges that we as humans face.

Pollution, climate change and the issue of water point back to humans as they are overcome with consumerism and who can get and keep the most. The people who suffer in these situations are the poor of the world. "There has been a tragic rise in the number of migrants seeking to flee from the growing poverty caused by environmental degradation." (Laudato Si' #25). The rich get richer. Francis echoes the words of Ketteler "thus, the rich man is in fact depriving his brother of the things which the Creator meant for him to have." (first Advent sermon).

Again, Ketteler says the we must go forward recognizing that God as our Creator has dominion over all Creation. Francis wrote "Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity." Both Francis and Ketteler are calling us to share the earth and all its resources. "Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption..." (Laudato Si page 156).

"The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all." (Laudato Si #23). Human activity is creating greenhouse gases which affect all of us. Our continued use of fossil fuels increases our carbon footprint. Our use of soil for agricultural purposes and deforestation has also increased the ruination of this planet. It is human greed that drives our activities, our farming practices, our denuding the earth in Northern Hemisphere forests and tropical forests in and around the Amazon jungle.

"The melting in the polar ice caps and in high altitude plains can lead to the dangerous release of methane gas, while the decomposition of frozen organic material can further increase the emission of carbon dioxide." (Laudato Si' #24) These pollutants affect our oceans and marine food chain. "...this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an

unprecedented destruction of eco systems, with serious consequences for all of us.” (Laudato Si’ #24)

Ketteler spoke about right of private ownership and ...”is required for the diligent care and management of property as well as in the interest of order and peace. ... man, while here on earth, must fulfill the will of God.” Francis writes: “Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.” (Laudato Si’ #30). The Catholic Church encourages this right of private ownership but tempers this teaching by saying that we must share these resources. We must guard against the overuse of our waters and our lands.

Pope Francis also discusses the loss of biodiversity. In addition to the loss of forests and woodlands, we are losing species “which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, “not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses.” (page 160) Many reasons related to human activity cause the extinction of thousands of animal and plant species, yearly.

Human’s quality of life also suffers as we misuse/abuse the resources that God has allowed us to manage. “We are not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and be deprived of physical contact with nature.” (Laudato Si’ #44). Privatization of some spaces to find an artificial tranquility restricts access to outsiders. These so called “safe areas” are open to some of the human population but t not to all.

As both resources and climate deteriorate the people who suffer the most are the poor. They comprise most of the earth’s population. Yet, the rich and comfortable think of the poor only as an afterthought. They have extraordinarily little, if any, contact with the poor in their suffering. “The lack of physical contact and encounter...can lead to a numbing of conscience...which neglect parts of reality.” (Laudato Si’ #49). Francis says that “We need to strengthen the conviction that we are one single human family. There are no frontiers or barriers, political or social behind which we can hide, still less is there room for the globalization of indifference.” (Laudato Si’ #52).

Francis goes on to write about our weak response to the earth’s need for protection. We must confront this crisis by not delaying or avoiding decisions that need to be made. As humans we must protect the earth by controlling wild consumption and waste disposal by coming together as one family and not as rivals.

Finally, Francis addresses the variety of opinions about climate change and the loss of a biodiverse ecosystem. “On many concrete questions, the Church has no reason to offer a definitive opinion, she knows that honest debate must be encouraged among experts, while respecting divergent views.” (Laudato Si’ #61). “If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations.” (Laudato Si’ #61).

Ketteler long ago wrote that “God gave us this earth and all of its resources so that man could draw sustenance from them.” (first Advent Sermon” As human beings, we need to bring back

charity. "Then and only then will we preserve our Faith, because the Christian Faith can only survive where it is activated by Christian charity."

Reflection:

What does this second 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?

Action:

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.

Submitted by Linda Hoefflin