

LAUDATO SI': ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Encyclical Letter

Pope Francis

Chapter 6: Ecological Education and Spirituality

READ:

Pope Francis completes his encyclical by writing that a “great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal.”

From the first Advent sermon of Bishop Wilhelm von Ketteler: “St. Thomas teaches that all creatures and all earthly goods, by virtue of their original nature, can belong only to God. This thesis follows logically from the article of Faith which tells us that everything created by God Himself was created from nothing. Therefore, God is the true and exclusive ultimate proprietor of all creatures. (Translated by Rupert J. Ederer, Ph.D., Buffalo, N. Y. First sermon, November 19, 1848)

Realizing that all things are under the proprietorship of God, Pope Francis indicates that it is human beings will need to make changes. Echoing Ketteler’s thoughts in Human Dignity, Francis states: “When people become self-centered 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. While human beings are capable of the worst, they are also able to rise, begin anew and transform. So, our challenge is to examine our lifestyle as it relates to our environment.

Humanity must realize that there is a covenant between human beings and the rest of the earth. We are called to educate ourselves and develop a code of ethics in dealing with the world’s ecology, even the ecology of the universe. Our development will be ineffectual unless “we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.” (part 215, Laudato Si)

Francis says that we are called to ecological conversion. We must realize that the world is God’s loving gift and “we are called to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works.” (part 220, Laudato Si). We relate to all living things through our Creator. The power of God’s grace must be evident in relationships with all creatures. Once we lose our humility and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably endure harming society and the environment. In his sermon on Human Destiny, Ketteler said: Our destination is either outside of this world, in God, in which case our life on earth is merely a preparation for that ultimate goal-or else our destiny is to enjoy what we are able to enjoy here on earth and to terminate our existence afterwards like the animals do. The believer prefers the former view, the unbeliever holds the latter.” It is an attitude from the heart which encourages us to be calmly attentive to our surroundings. Every moment is provided to us by God.

Under Civic and Political, Francis reminds that we need one another. “love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also ‘macro-relationships, social, economic, and political

ones.” (part 231 Laudato Si). We can begin by small gestures of kindness and build to more public and political concerns. With self-giving, these movements can become very spiritual.

In *Sacramental Signs and the Celebration of Rest*, Francis reminds us that even the smallest leaf can lead us to God. The more we allow ourselves to feel the presence of God, the deeper our spirituality will be, and we can feel God working within us. As we participate in the sacraments our bond is nearing a different plane. Water, oils, colors, music, and, singing lift us closer to our Lord Jesus. The ultimate sign is the Eucharist when bread and wine are changed into the true Body and Blood. We are led to Jesus’ divinity and to all of creation through the changing of the bread and wine.

As we take time to contemplate, we are providing rest for our bodies and minds. When we open ourselves spiritually, we are allowing time to heal our physical as well as emotional parts of our being. Contemplating the Eucharist can open our hearts to the needs of all humanity and creatures. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that her or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in the communion with God, with others and with all creatures.” (Part 240, Laudato SI.) We are interconnected and thus we need to develop a global spirituality.

“At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God, and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, why with us will share in unending plenitude.” (part 243, Laudato Si) We are called to commit all of ourselves to protect all that God has created.

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.