

HOME RETREAT 5TH FEBRUARY 2022

A RUN THROUGH THE ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI'

The Glasgow meeting of COP 26 raised the urgency of a response to the situation of the Earth and in particular its Climate, which is showing signs of changing. Although I do not believe that Climate change can be stopped or reversed, I do believe that COP 26 has raised our awareness of our responsibility to live in harmony with nature, with all our fellow human beings and with wisdom and values informing our behaviour. To this end, I believe that a run through the Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' would be helpful in informing us how to do this – and indeed, the Laudato Si' Movement which was very active during COP26 has put forward an Action plan which is well worth integrating into our lives.

I am hoping to take a look at the Encyclical Letter with those who would like to join me, looking at the Introduction today and each of the six chapters in subsequent Retreats during 2022. These chapters are entitled: 'What is happening to our common home?'; The Gospel of Creation; The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis; Integral Ecology; Lines of Approach and Action; Ecological Education and Spirituality. So, this morning let us look at Pope Francis' Introduction.

Before even introducing the Letter, inspired by the Canticle of St Francis, Pope Francis calls the Earth 'Our Common Home'. This immediately connects with all of us who have had or presently inhabit a 'home'. Even those who are Homeless can aspire to be inhabitants of this Common Home. As Pope Francis introduces the Canticle 'Laudato Si', he points out that this Common Home is related to us intimately like a Sister or a Mother, with whom we share life, and who embraces us by sustaining and nourishing us. He then declares that this Sister, this Mother is crying out because of our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which she is endowed by God. These are powerful images to engage our attention and focus on the Earth. Furthermore, Francis says that the Earth can be counted 'among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor' adding the dimension of justice and fairness to our concern for our Mother, as well as the implication that we ourselves are poorer since we are made up of her elements and sustained by her life.

Francis points out that this concern is not new. It goes back more than 50 years to John XXIII who addressed all people of 'good will'. Francis addresses **everyone on the planet** and desires to enter into dialogue with them about Our Common Home. He refers to Paul VI, who used the term Ecological catastrophe and the need for 'radical change in the conduct of humanity'. John Paul II spoke of the need for an 'ecological conversion', and the need to 'safeguard the moral conditions for an authentic human ecology'. These themes are brought together and explained in this Encyclical, together with other more recent themes. Francis mentions his predecessor Benedict XVI, in particular, who pointed out that 'The Book of Nature is one and indivisible and includes the Environment, Life, Sexuality, the Family, Social Relations and so forth. The deterioration of nature is closely connected with the culture that shapes human coexistence.' He wanted us to realise that the natural environment has suffered severe damage due to our irresponsible behaviour and that the social environment has suffered similarly. He concludes that this suffering is linked to the notion in many minds, that there are **no indisputable truths to guide our lives and hence human freedom is limitless**. He goes on to say that **'creation is harmed where we ourselves have the final word, where everything is simply our property, and we use it for ourselves alone. We no longer recognise any higher instance than ourselves, we see nothing else but ourselves**. 'These statements of the Popes echo the reflections of numerous scientists, philosophers, theologians and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church's thinking on these questions. Outside the Catholic Church, other Churches

and Christian communities – and other religions as well – have expressed deep concern and offered valuable reflections on issues which all of us find disturbing.’

Pope Francis then goes on to cite St Francis, whose name he took when elected. ‘Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.’ He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the **choices which determine our behaviour**. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on our immediate needs. Through Scripture St Francis showed that “Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker” (Wis 13:5).

The remainder of the Introduction is an appeal by Pope Francis His words are all we need, I hope, to get us moving.

‘The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, **for we know that things can change**. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability **to work together in building our common home**. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded. I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet.

We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions.

We require a new and universal solidarity. All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements and talents. It is my hope that this Encyclical Letter, which is now added to the body of the Church’s social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face.’

Thank you for listening. I include a link to the Encyclical on the Vatican website and a sheet with the Laudato Si’ Movement’s Action Plan. There are also some questions you might like to ask yourself. God bless you all.