

Caring For God's Creation And Everyone In It

Five years ago, Pope Francis wrote about the connection between our relationship with God, with our fellow men and women, and with the created world in the encyclical "Laudato Si'." Here is a brief personal reflection on its significance.

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As we know, our Christian faith affects every aspect of our lives. Among many other consequences, it leads us to want to make this world a true home for everyone around us. Indeed, the encyclical *Laudato Si'* isn't the first time the Church has spoken about the earth as our common home. In the body of teachings called the "social doctrine of the Church", the Magisterium has brought to the attention of the faithful different dimensions of mankind's duty to care for the common good and to be a steward of creation.

The novelist Elizabeth Goudge says, "Our true home is where what is around us echoes the best that we are." During this period in which many people have been asked to "stay home" and, in some cases, even forbidden from going outside, we may have found ourselves reflecting on the role our home plays in daily

life. At the same time, we know that our "home" is also, in some way, the whole universe that God made, and the beauty of the natural world tells us something about Who He is.

Among other things, it can help us to live our lives with true Christian joy.

The Pope offers Saint Francis of Assisi as an example of someone who lived his life based on an integral ecology. In his biography of St. Francis, G.K. Chesterton writes, "Cynical men have said, 'Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall not be disappointed.' But St. Francis said, 'Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall enjoy everything.' He came to enjoy even earthly things as few people have enjoyed them."

Of course, what the Pope has in mind is not just a "feel-good" approach to nature but rather one that's ready to make sacrifices to resist consumerism and exploitation, two

tendencies that have harmed human societies throughout history. In reality, the good life is a simple life, because taking care of our surroundings goes hand in hand with the virtues of temperance and self-mastery, basic features of a Christian personality that ultimately lead to greater joy and a happier life.

Nevertheless, some issues seem to arise: for example, what does this imply for businesses? Is the Church saying one should avoid trying to make a profit or to have possessions? Clearly this is not the case. As we see in other Church documents (one even bears the title “The Vocation of the Business Leader”), the Church considers business a “noble vocation” that can be an incredible force for good. Indeed, when the people who are called to run an enterprise put human dignity at the heart of their work, it can transform society for the better, including by

lifting people out of poverty. Together with business leaders, politicians also play a huge role in shaping society. Pope Francis writes that we should all “regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world” (*Laudato Si'*, 229).

Keeping all this in mind, we see that the heart of *Laudato Si'* is a call to responsibly adopt a fuller awareness of the fact that all our actions have consequences that affect others. Too often, the poor and the vulnerable suffer from the effects of ecological damage they haven’t caused. At the same time, it seems more than a coincidence that so many of us note the effects of our disordered relationships with nature in our interactions with other people – who we often try to control, perhaps without realizing it – and even within our very selves. A subtle,

unconscious “need” to dominate
makes us anxious and insecure.

To really make a difference, we need to be close to those who suffer, serving them face-to-face and not from a comfortable distance.

Thankfully, many people are living generously right where they are, and we can see countless examples of this. Pope Francis has returned to this theme again and again in his preaching: authentic faith should lead to real charity, the cornerstone of the New Commandment. The Pope highlights some pressing ecological issues that have serious consequences for the poor, including pollution and water quality. "Today," he writes, "we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" (*Laudato Si'*, 49).

In short, we need to recognize that we are interdependent, in order to look for real solutions to our own problems and to help others.

“Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another” (*Laudato Si'*, 42). Our striving to live charity and solidarity within our own families and neighborhoods takes on a new and deeper meaning when we recognize that even our small actions can have a ripple effect throughout God’s universe. One good way to thank our Creator is to take good care of the Creation He has given us.
