

Welcome to this Home Retreat on the Last Chapter of Laudato Si', Chapter 6 on Ecological Education and Spirituality.

Last week, I did a Retreat in the Grange with a lovely group of nine people, going through all six chapters of Laudato Si'. This 6th and final chapter is the most practical and the most challenging since it demands action. I am using a summary from the Laudato Si' Movement's site, which I didn't use last week, but is worth reading. As Pope Francis says....

“Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone... A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us”. (202) Consumerism makes us feel that we are free as long as we have the freedom to consume. “When people become self-centred 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.” A genuine sense of the common good disappears and “social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs.” (204) Human beings, however, are “capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning.” (205) Consumer boycotts of certain products show us that, when their earnings are affected, businesses **do** find ways to produce differently. We need to set limits on ourselves to help others and the environment. “If we can overcome individualism, we will truly be able to develop a different lifestyle and bring about significant changes in society.” “Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment.” (208)

Although young people “are making admirable efforts to protect the environment”, old habits are hard to break, so people of all ages need an educational campaign “for the covenant between humanity and the environment.” Environmental education originally concentrated on scientific information but now exposes the “myths” of modernity (“individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism, the unregulated market”). “It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with

others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God.” (210) Laws and regulations only work up to a point. To produce “long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately **motivated** to accept them and personally transformed to respond.” Pope Francis suggests “little daily actions” like wearing warmer clothes to use less heating, avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, using public transport or car pooling, planting trees and turning off unnecessary lights. Reusing instead of discarding “when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.” (211) Environmental education should happen at school, in the media and particularly within the family, a setting where we learn “to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings.” (213) Political institutions, the church, and church communities all need to spread awareness of the problems of poverty and of the environment. To overcome indifference, we need “an ecological conversion”, so that our relationship with Jesus affects how we relate to the world around us. We need to act as individuals and as communities. We need new attitudes to foster a new spirit. Firstly “a recognition that the world is God’s **loving gift**, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works”. (220) We are part of a “universal communion” of God’s creatures. “Jesus says of the birds of the air that “not one of them is forgotten before God” (*Lk* 12:6). How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm?” (221) or any other of God’s creatures?

Joy and Peace: Christian spirituality, like other religious traditions, tells us “that less is more.” Rather than a constant flood of new consumer goods, “Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things.... to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.” (223) “It is not easy to promote this kind of **healthy humility** or **happy sobriety** when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego,” (224) We need inner peace which “is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a **capacity for wonder** which takes us to

a deeper understanding of life.... Many people today sense a profound imbalance..." (225) Jesus showed us the right attitude, "He was completely present to everyone and to everything, and in this way he showed us the way to overcome that unhealthy anxiety which makes us superficial, aggressive and compulsive consumers." (226) Pope Francis suggests that we demonstrate this attitude by giving "thanks to God before and after meals" which "reminds us of our dependence on God for life," shows gratitude for the food we need and for those who grow it and an awareness of those who do not have enough.

Civic and Political Love "We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it." Rather than "mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that **light-hearted superficiality** has done us **no good.**" (229) "Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship." (230)

"Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also **civic and political**, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. 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". That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilisation of love". Social love is the key to authentic development: "In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity". In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a "culture of care" which permeates all of society.....this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us." (231)

"Society is also enriched by a countless array of organisations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban" e.g. community groups which look after a building, a theatre or part of the countryside. This type of community

action increases the sense “that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.” (232)

Sacramental signs and the celebration of rest “The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely.” We can encounter God in the world around us, e.g. “a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person’s face.” Walking “lonely valleys” where there is birdsong, running water and the wind in the trees refreshes us and shows us something of God. Pope Francis extols the symbolic power of the Sacraments, but it “is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures.” (236)

“The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, “*so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed*” (Ex 23:12). Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others.” (237)

The Trinity and the relationship between creatures “The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways.” (238) One key to our fulfilment as humans is our relationships, with each other, and with God. “The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures.” (240)

Mary, the mother of Jesus, now lives in heaven where “she treasures the entire life of Jesus in her Heart (cf Lk2: 19,51). Her husband Joseph, “a just man, hard-working and strong” sets an example that can inspire us.

Beyond the sun “At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. 1 Cor 13:12) ... Jesus says: “*I make all things new*” (Rev 21:5). Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place”.

(243) “God, who calls us to generous commitment and to give him our

all, offers us the light and the strength needed to continue on our way. In the heart of this world, the Lord of life, who loves us so much, is always present. He does not abandon us, he does not leave us alone, for he has united himself definitively to our earth, and his love constantly impels us to find new ways forward. *Praise be to him!*" (245)

Pope Francis finishes his May 2015 encyclical with two prayers: the first for all who believe "in a God who is the all-powerful Creator" and the second to ask for inspiration for Christians "to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus." (246).

Thank you for listening. As usual there are some resources to consider and a draught timetable for the rest of the day.