**EUCHARIST AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY**

Archbishop Mark Coleridge

*Laudato si*’ are the opening words of the great ecstatic hymn of St Francis of Assisi, *il Poverello*, the greatest religious genius that the West has produced. Now, in that it's a vision of brother and sister - and we sing the words over and over again and rightly so, “Brother Sun, Sister Moon” - but also that that most overlooked of our Sisters, that is, Death, that even death is part of a divine ecology according to Francis, and what you find in Francis's hymn is a mystical and ecstatic vision of radical interconnectedness and [Fr] Daniel [Horan OFM], of course, has touched upon this as the Pope does in the Encyclical Letter. That's what we mean when we use these rather unusual words, “***i***ntegral” - we even pronounce it sometimes int***e***gral – “ecology”. When I looked at the title, *Eucharist and Integral Ecology*, I thought, what a mouthful for English speakers! I mean, “Eucharist” itself is a clumsy Greek word, “integral” is, well, it's Latin, and we get more clumsy Greek in “ecology”, so the language is a bit heavy, and I'm not sure Saint Francis would have taken it on board, but we have. But when we speak of integral ecology we are talking about this mystical ecstatic vision of radical interconnectedness.

And again, Daniel has touched upon this, the fact that we are stardust. I think of those words of a text that was very popular years ago called *Desiderata*. It started off with “You are a child of the universe” no less than the trees and stars. In fact, sitting wherever you are, you are stardust, and I am speaking stardust here in offering what I offer.

So, the interconnectedness is far more radical than we had thought, and it's that vision to which mysticism and ecstasy give access, and that's the very distinctive and crucial contribution. I think that is what Pope Francis makes in *Laudato si*’, and that he will build upon in this new Encyclical Letter that he will sign into action, as it were, on the 3rd of October in Assisi. Again, he will say Mass at the tomb of the Saint and will sign this document, this new teaching, at the tomb, and that will build upon this this mystical and ecstatic vision.

Now, in the Encyclical Letter, there is the seed of a mystical and ecstatic vision of the Eucharist, and this is very important and again very original and distinctive as a contribution to the larger conversation. Sometimes, you hear people speaking about the Eucharist as if it's just some kind of role play calling to mind in a rather vapid way something that Jesus did two thousand years ago.

Well, if that's all the Eucharist is, in the end, who cares? But, of course, the Eucharist is vastly more than some one-dimensional role player, something that happened long ago so what we need is a mystical and ecstatic vision of the Eucharist which shows its connections, its radical connection with integral ecology.

Now, you start with something extremely simple, and Daniel has touched on this. We take bread and wine. Now, when you look at them on the altar, they're almost embarrassingly simple, bread and wine, but this is the logic of the Incarnation, God who takes flesh in a baby. Well, that's pretty simple to do, so there is always a great tension between what we start with, bread and wine, and what we end up with, and it's that transformation that calls us into a mystical and ecstatic vision of what God is actually doing in the Eucharist and keeping in mind that the Eucharist is something God does, just as creation is something God does, just as we stardust are something that God does, not primarily something we do. That's the problem with the role play account.

So, we take bread and wine which are the creation. In a sense, they symbolize in all their grand simplicity the whole of the cosmos. Who would have thought it, when you take this little wafer and this drop of wine -it's pretty cheap wine too, normally – that we are gathering up the whole of the cosmos which exceeds our powers of imagination. How many galaxies are there, billions, is it? I'm not sure what the latest count is, there's a lot of them, and the cosmos is big, and bread and wine are small, but that's what we say, that's what we see in this mystical and ecstatic vision of what God is doing.

So, the whole of the cosmos is somehow mysteriously gathered up in that bread and wine, but it's not just the creation, because what the bread and wine represent is also human creativity, and we say this. Daniel again has spoken the words that we speak at the altar: “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” All right, fruit of the earth – oh! cosmos, not just the earth, but fruit of the creation but also work of human hands. So, the Eucharist is all about human creativity. But it's not just creativity, it's co-creativity.

If you go back to Genesis Chapter 2, there you find that God calls the human being at one point. God says, “Adam, come here, I've got a job for you.” And God is doing animals this day, so God is very good with words, God could call the animals, “cat, dog, cow”, but he decides to call Adam, “Come here, I've got a job for you. See that animal down there? I want you to name it. I could, but I don't. I want you to name it. So, Adam takes one look and says “dog”. God says, “Excellent choice.” So, what's happening there is that the bible is presenting the human being as a co-creator with God. God wants to work with us in the ongoing business of creation.

It's an astonishing claim, *[unclear words]*, that the bible makes about the human being: we are co-creators, and that's the importance of “fruit of the earth and work of human hands.” So, the Eucharist gathers up the whole cosmos, the material universe, but it gathers up also the co-creativity of the human being at the very heart of what God is doing in that whole Cosmos. So, we are to be co-creators, we are to be stewards, and this again is clear in Genesis Chapter One, where God says, “You be the steward, you look after this extraordinary creation in my name.” Now, what we say in the Eucharist is that these, the bread and wine and the human creativity that produced them, are transfigured, or transformed or transubstantiated, trans-something. There are all kinds of ways of accounting for what God does, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, they are transformed, transfigured, both the bread and wine and the human creativity that produce the bread and wine. Once they're transfigured, they become the great promise of what is to come, that the whole cosmos - and this is an extraordinary claim that again only a mystical and ecstatic vision can produce - that the whole cosmos and our co-creativity at the heart of it will become the risen Christ. That's where it's all going, folks - that's what God's up to that's what history and the history of the whole cosmos, is all about. That's what we say at the altar.

Saint Paul says in Colossians 3, and these words have haunted me for a long time: there is only Christ. He is everything and he is in everything, and that's what the Eucharist is saying. Once the transfiguration of the elements including us happens by the power of the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, that everything is going to become the risen Christ, is becoming the risen Christ, and there will be only Christ. Paul also says that, at that point, God will be all in all. So, what the Eucharist represents, and this is at the very heart of the papal teaching on integral ecology, is that it is a promise of our return to paradise. That's where it all began and that's where it's all heading.

When I say our return to paradise, I don't just mean stardust human beings. I do, but I mean the whole cosmos. Again, the fantastic text of Romans that Daniel has given us: “The whole of creation groans in a great act of giving birth,” and the birth is the return to paradise. We've got to be born again, to get through the gates, home to paradise, because paradise is our true home. This earth, even this cosmos, is not our true home. We have to go back to paradise. The risen Jesus is the first one home to paradise. The second one home, we say, is his Mother. That's what the Assumption is all about, but where they go, the rest of us, including the cosmos, are all heading.

Now, the creation groans in an act of giving birth, and there's a good reason for the groaning. It's painful, both birth and death have pangs, and they can look very much like each other. There is a death in every birth and a birth in every death. So, Sister Birth and Sister Death are very closely related. So, for us to return to paradise, there must be pain, and that's why the bread is broken, and the blood is poured out. The bread has to be broken, the blood has to be poured out. There has to be the sacrifice before there can be the feast, because if there is not the sacrifice, the gates of paradise are locked, and the seraph stands there with the flaming sword, saying, “Go back, into the desert.”

But, in fact, the bread is broken, and the blood is poured out, and it all becomes the risen Christ whose scars shine like the sun. So, the truth is that we return to paradise. We come home only through the gate of self-sacrificing love. Here again, we touch into the mystical and ecstatic vision of radical interconnectedness, because it is the self-sacrificing love, the *agape*, which is God, which creates that interconnectedness, which is the very womb of integral ecology.

Let me conclude, or bring to a point of rest, these words of reflection, by offering you words of Thomas Merton which are cited in this remarkable book called, *The Blue Sapphire of the Mind,* subtitled, *Notes for a Contemplative Ecology*, by Douglas Christie. It's a big book but it's a fascinating read. Towards the end, Christie cites these words of Merton that I offer you this morning or this afternoon or this evening, wherever you are. Merton writes this, “The whole world has risen in Christ. If God is all in all, then everything is in fact paradise, because it is filled with the glory and presence of God, and nothing is any more separated from God.”

So, I leave you with those words of Thomas Merton and return to the silence from which I came. Thank you.

*This text was constructed from the transcript of closed captions from YouTube. It represents the body of a reflexion by Archbishop Coleridge in the second* Laudato si’Season of Creation *Webinar, broadcast by Zoom from Brisbane, on 11 September 2020. Permission for publication requested and granted.*