***Monthly Spiritual Message***

**July 2020**

**THE MERCY OF GOD AND *LAUDATO SI’* IN POPE FRANCIS**

**AND ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

**(**Part I)

Fr Anthony Fox OFMConv

The Earth was created to support life and to give praise to God, but it is crying out with pain because human activity is destroying it. These are strong words to begin our reflection, but it is the reason that Pope Francis wrote his Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si’* - On the Care of Our Common Home.

A lack of respect for creation is a lack of respect for God, who created all that exists.

Pope Francis chose the writings of his Patron to make sense of what is happening to our planet. He chose “The Canticle of the Creatures” because not only is it beautiful and the first poem written in the Italian language, but St Francis’ ideals and perspectives are not only beautiful but blunt and clear.

“The Canticle of the Creatures” was written by St Francis towards the end of his life. It was his Magna Carta of how he perceived God and the world.

Pope Francis begins his Encyclical, “On the Care of Our Common Home”, with the opening line of St Francis’ Canticle, “Praise be to you, my Lord….” (Laudato Si’)

The Pope states boldly that “a person cannot claim to respect nature while supporting abortion, and no one can claim to be Pro-life without a commitment to reverse damage done to the environment.”

“The earth, our home”, the Pope, says, “is beginning to look more like an immense pile of filth.”

Pope Francis recognizes that “Sister Earth” is crying out, pleading that the human race take another course of action marked by healing and protecting the earth and ALL its inhabitants.

St. Francis’ “Canticle of the Creatures” expresses the truth that God is the Creator of all things, that every part of creation speaks of God’s love and power, and that every created being is part of God’s love and power, and that every created being is part of an independent whole.

“Everything is related”, the Pope says, “and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love that God has for each of his creatures and which unites us in fond affection with Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother River and Mother Earth.”

In the Encyclical, Pope Francis calls on every Catholic and on all people of good will to do their part in being environmentally friendly.

He urges all Catholics to return to the practice of saying Grace before Meals, a habit that reminds us regularly that the food we are about to eat is a gift that comes from the earth and from God.

He also urges us to cultivate simplicity. It is good for the soul and good for the planet.

The Pope insists: “A sense of deep communion with the rest of nature cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion, and concern for our fellow human beings.”

He gives us practical examples, such as: “It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in an endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking, unconcerned about the poor, or undertaking to destroy another human being deemed unwanted.”

Pope Francis said: “I believe that St. Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.”

The Encyclical challenges the whole believing world to a process of ongoing conversion that is so essential to living the Gospel. There are certain themes that run through the Encyclical that reveal his Franciscan connection and his Jesuit methodology. This will help to understand his overall message:

1. The intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet.
2. The conviction that everything in the world is connected.
3. The critique of new paradigms and forms of power derived from technology.
4. The call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress.
5. The value proper to each creature.
6. The human meaning of ecology.
7. The need for forthright and honest debate.
8. The throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

The Pope speaks forcibly about global inequality. He says: “The deterioration of the environment and society affects the most vulnerable people on the planet. The 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.”

We are an integral part of God’s plane for the whole of creation.

We are meant for relationship with God, with one another and with the world in which we live.

Peace and all good things!

Fr. Anthony P. Fox OFMConv.

National Spiritual Assistant OFS - Australia