

Reader 1: [Yellow signifies a new slide].

**Welcome** to this time of reflection on the life of St Francis and on the impact of his spirituality today. **We**, members of the Holy Spirit Fraternity, many of whom are St John Vianney parishioners, will be your hosts as we explore three relevant themes in today's world: **Peace, Poverty and Planet**. We ask to be guided by the Holy Spirit during this time of coming to know what it means to live a Franciscan life today.

**First, an introduction to Francis' life ... So who was St Francis?**

**Francis** lived at a time when Italian city states were at war with each other for land. After his birth in 1182, he is baptised John, and his father who returns from a business trip in France, changes his name to Francesco, the Frenchman.

Surrounded by European wealth and culture, Francis has romantic dreams of becoming a knight, an ambition he fulfils when Assisi goes to war with Perugia. At 21 years old he faces the reality of war when he is taken prisoner for a year, and then spends a further year recovering at home.

**On** another knightly mission to defend the Holy Roman Empire, God tells Francis to return to Assisi, and while he is praying before the crucifix of the dilapidated little chapel of San Damiano he receives the call that would change his life. From the crucifix comes the voice, 'Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is falling into ruin.'

**Francis** believes he is to build and repair the run-down chapel of San Damiano, begging stones and repairing with his own hands. Slowly, he begins to see that the 'house' is much more than the bricks and mortar. The larger run-down house is the Christian Church that God calls him to repair.

**One** day, at the sight of a man with leprosy, Francis gives him coins and embraces him. Not repulsed but filled with joy, he realizes he has met Jesus Christ his Lord. People with leprosy become God's living stones. Here is God among the rejected, the despised and the poor.

**Thus** begins the Franciscan way of rebuilding of the Church. Others soon join Francis. They become a brotherhood, and the Church approves their way of life to live with the poor as the poor who observe the Holy Gospel with their whole being. Francis and the brothers live as mendicants, preaching and working with their hands for their daily bread; and when they receive nothing, they beg for food. They make peace with the castes that others despise. They embrace them instead of running away.

**Clare** and her companions too join Francis' way, and they receive from the Bishop of Assisi San Damiano, the church Francis restored with his own hands. They also work with their hands and depend on the begging of the brothers for their daily bread. They pray for and minister to the sick who are brought to their door.

**Francis'** movement grows. Towards true peace, he makes missionary journeys with other brothers, preaching conversion and forgiveness, visiting Spain, France, Switzerland, Dalmatia, and even Syria, the Holy Land, and Egypt during the Fifth Crusade. He tries to make peace between the Christians and Muslims by entering the camp of the Sultan, and by preaching conversion of heart and forgiveness. The Sultan listens and gives Francis safe passage through his kingdom.

Francis also reveres all created things. He preaches to the animals and birds and fish. He embraces and tames a ravenous wolf.

**The** humanity of Jesus Christ shines through for Francis when he establishes the tradition of the Christmas crib, and, two years before his death when he receives the stigmata, the visible image of the five wounds of Christ.

**Before** he welcomes death, Francis composes the Canticle of the Creatures, a hymn to creation that sums up his life of love and forgiveness. He bids all creatures to forgive one another if they want to be crowned by God. Death becomes his sister whom he embraces on October 4, 1226 and he is canonised by Gregory IX less than two years later.

**Francis'** way is shared by many brothers, sisters, priests and lay people, who see Jesus Christ in all God's creation and in the lives of the suffering today. He has challenged humanity to love, forgive and honour creation as a family of sisters and brothers. Francis reveals our inter-connectedness with all creation, for which Pope John Paul II has named him the patron saint of ecology.<sup>1</sup>

**Let** us now take a few minutes to reflect on what Francis' message might mean for us today.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Murray Bodo, "Saint Francis," 2010 <http://www.franciscansinternational.org/francis>.

<sup>2</sup> R.J. Powell, "Peace for the Journey," (Mar 19, 2008. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhQeQMQ-Bs8>).

[At this time, play the following 'Youtube' video: Powell, R.J. "Peace for the Journey." available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zhQeQMQ-Bs8> ]

Reader 2:

## **Francis' spirituality of peace**

Francis lived for peace ...

**We** live in times of inter-cultural tension and conflict, when cultures do not understand each other, when countries are at war and where innocent people are caught up in the cross-fire of the political will of military power. And yet, people of every nation are in search of peace. **St** Augustine who lived some seven hundred years before St Francis captured the longing of the human heart when he said:

**'You** have formed us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you.<sup>3</sup>

**Seven** hundred years after St Francis, Oscar Romero, the Roman Catholic bishop of San Salvador spoke out against civil war when more and more of his own people were arrested, tortured, and murdered. Romero claimed the Church's evangelical spirit of prayer, trust, sincerity and justice, over the wrongful use of political power. He was gunned down on 24 March 1980 whilst saying Mass for daring to proclaim God's commandment: 'Thou shalt not kill.'<sup>4</sup>

**Pope** Benedict reminds us in his homily during the 2007 World Day of Peace that respect for the human person, in ourselves and others, is our responsibility and the only way to true peace. **Made** in the image of the Creator, with the gift of freedom to share of ourselves with others, we are also called to use our freedom wisely, to enter into a relationship of faith and love that no other creature is able to give.<sup>5</sup> Our freedom also obliges us to work towards true peace. As gifts and instruments of divine love, God calls us to restore harmony to a world broken by human sin.<sup>6</sup>

### **How can Francis's life teach us the way to true peace?**

**Francis'** visit to the Sultan of Egypt may offer a way forward towards peace in the modern world. In 1219 he made the journey from Italy with his companion Br Illuminato. **At** that time Christians and Muslims were in a state of conflict over Muslim expansion into Europe, Muslim occupation of Christian holy places and the holy wars of the Crusades.<sup>7</sup> Francis made the visit, not to die as a martyr, but to develop a peaceful relationship with the Muslims as a missionary of the Christian faith. Contrary to a common view of his day, Muslims were to be treated, not as enemies, nor even as 'friend', but as 'brother'. **According** to the written record of the conversation, passed on by Brother Illuminato, the Sultan saw in Francis an intense desire for peace. Understood as wise, compassionate and a seeker of truth, the Sultan returned Francis safely to Christian territory. Also as a man of peace, the Sultan sought peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians after the Fifth Crusade. **He** returned Jerusalem to the Crusaders and gave the Franciscans custody of the Christian holy places.

During the Fifth Crusade, when crusaders attempted to conquer Egypt, on their way to win back Jerusalem and the Holy Land and were turned back, **Francis** experienced the stigmata, the five wounds of Christ in his hands and in his side. These wounds confirmed the rightness of his path as a peacemaker by revealing Christ's own desire for peace.<sup>8</sup>

**To** this day, the Franciscans maintain the Holy Places in the pursuit of world peace.

Francis' own words and the Franciscan tradition may offer us a vision of peace.

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<sup>3</sup> St Augustine, *Confessions. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. First Series*, ed. Philip Schaaf, vol. Vol 1 (Buffalo, New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>): Bk 1 Ch 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Dear, "Oscar Romero, 25 Years Later," <http://www.fatherjohndear.org/>.

<sup>5</sup> XVI Pope Benedict, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace. The Human Person, the Heart of Peace," 2007. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20061208\\_xl-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20061208_xl-world-day-peace_en.html): n.4

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: 5.

<sup>7</sup> "Time-Line of Jerusalem History ", 2010 <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/israel/jerusalem-timeline.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Vardy. "Blessed is the Peacemaker," *Tablet* 25 April 2009

**Jesus'** blessing in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall see God'<sup>9</sup> inspired Francis to write:

*'The true peacemakers are those who preserve peace of mind and body for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, despite what they suffer in this world'.<sup>10</sup>*

True inner peace came by committing oneself to a grateful love of Jesus Christ, who lay down his life for all. Francis hoped to alleviate human suffering by sharing Jesus' unconditional love for others that they too might experience the contentment of God's inner peace. As Francis lay close to death, his legacy for others, in spite of his own suffering, was his blessing: 'The Lord give you peace.'<sup>11</sup>

As we reflect on St Francis' vision of peace, our response is:

**Francis** *who walked in the footsteps of the Saviour, help us to understand true peace.*

**When** he went about preaching, people of all ages were drawn to the beauty of his words. Francis would open with the blessing, 'May the Lord grant you his peace.' His quiet inspiration inflamed people's hearts and led many to resolve inner distress and bitter disputes. Francis fostered peace in his own town by mediating a quarrel between the Bishop and Mayor of Assisi.<sup>12</sup> Others too 'became sons and daughters of Peace and seekers of their own salvation.'<sup>13</sup>

**Response:**

**Francis** *who walked in the footsteps of the Saviour, help us to understand true peace.*

Francis was convinced that reverence for God and the wisdom of knowing, loving and serving God are the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

**'Humility, patience, perfect simplicity, and true peace of heart are all ... [the Spirit's] aim, but above everything else it desires the fear of God, the divine wisdom, and the divine love of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit.'**<sup>14</sup>

When we realise that God's love is the ultimate power for meaning in life, we are more easily able to experience the peace that comes from patience, humility and simple living. The Spirit bestows God's richest blessings.

**Response:**

**Francis** *who walked in the footsteps of the Saviour, help us to understand true peace.*

**Francis** came to the point of realising Jesus' complete outpouring of himself on the cross (Philippians 2.7) where daily repentance led his heart, soul and mind to God. In the little church of San Damiano, before the San Damiano crucifix, Francis prayed for an open heart to live in faith, hope and love.<sup>15</sup>

*Most High, Glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my mind, give me right faith, a firm hope and perfect charity, so that I may always and in all things act according to Your Holy Will.*

In the mind of St Paul, Francis understood that everything in life was incomplete without the greatest gift of human love. 'And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.'<sup>16</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Mt 5.9

<sup>10</sup> St Francis, *The Writings of St Francis of Assisi. Part 1, Admonitions, Rules Etc.*, trans. Paschal Robinson (Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1906. Available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/wosf/wosf03.htm>). Admonitions 15

<sup>11</sup> ———, *The Writings of St Francis of Assisi. The Testament of St Francis*, trans. Paschal Robinson (Philadelphia: Dolphin Press, 1906. Available at Medieval Sourcebook: <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/stfran-test.html>).

<sup>12</sup> Province of the Holy Spirit Franciscan Friars, "Francis and Peace," 2010. <http://www.franciscans.org.au/spirituality/peace.html>.

<sup>13</sup> This quotation is recorded by Thomas of Celano, St Francis' first biographer. Ivan Gobry, *St Francis of Assisi* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> St Francis, "The Rule of St Francis: The Regula Non-Bullata," 1221. Available at [http://www.francescanitor.org/letters/non\\_bullata.pdf](http://www.francescanitor.org/letters/non_bullata.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Confraternity of Penitents, "Symbolism of the San Damiano Crucifix," 2010. <http://www.penitents.org/SanDamText.html>.

Response:

**Francis** *who walked in the footsteps of the Saviour, help us to understand true peace.*

In the Franciscan tradition, the tau cross has become a reminder of Jesus' own longing for unity on the cross: 'Father, I pray that they will be one, just as you and I are one.'<sup>17</sup> In Jesus' outstretched arms we may see the joy of the resurrection of a united humanity. God's peace and love when we unite with others as one spiritual family is reflected in the Franciscan greeting, 'Pax et Bonum' – all peace and good.<sup>18</sup>

Response:

**Francis** *who walked in the footsteps of the Saviour, help us to understand true peace.*

**Let us say this prayer together:**

Loving God, you gave your servant Francis the desire to become a channel of your peace. Out of his gratitude for Jesus' saving love on the Cross, Francis became God's ambassador for peace. Help us, in our quiet witness to the Gospel, to enter into a spirit of reverence for all who seek the truth with a contrite heart. Give us the courage to understand our fellow brothers and sisters locally and internationally in our desire for world peace. We ask this prayer in the name of Jesus our Brother. AMEN.

[Peace, Poverty, Planet]

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Cor 13.13

<sup>17</sup> Jn 17.21

<sup>18</sup> Clare B. Knowles., "St Bonaventure, St Francis, and the Bonum," 2010.

[http://www.assisijourney.com/public\\_ftp/Knowles%20on%20Itinerarium.pdf](http://www.assisijourney.com/public_ftp/Knowles%20on%20Itinerarium.pdf).

Reader 3:

### **3 Francis' poverty of heart**

Francis gave of himself in voluntary poverty, so that those in material or spiritual poverty could come to God. He wanted all to experience the total good of the all-powerful, most holy and supreme God.

**Many** in today's world are trapped by the poverty of physical hunger, torture, human trafficking, and natural disasters. These deprivations deny the human person a life of dignity and hope. Those in developed countries may also experience loneliness, despair, and a lack of human love. Pope Benedict reminds us that the lives of human beings are shaped by political, technical and economic power. These powers are forces for good or evil, and when misused, the fundamental rights of the human person, and their right to religious freedom are violated.<sup>19</sup> **Today** the Church is faced with the mission to speak out against injustices and in the spirit of the Beatitudes to plead for the rights of the physically poor, the marginalised and the socially or politically oppressed.

**In** his third encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (Love in Truth), Pope Benedict calls for everyone, at an individual, family, social or political level, to live by the principle of the common good. Seeking the good of others is a way of life which seeks a respect for each human being, the well-being of the group, and peaceful co-existence in society. Seeking the common good of our human neighbours involves much more than passing laws. It is to seek their common good by truly loving them<sup>20</sup>

**In** Francis' day the Church was very closely tied to the political power of the state. The Church's essential spiritual and pastoral authority allied itself with the economic interests of maintaining lands and wealth. Although remaining faithful to the teaching authority of the Church, Francis came to see the corrupting influence of power around him and how the structure of the Church at that time inadequately ministered to the majority of people who were poor and uneducated. Francis' calling was to embrace voluntary poverty of heart. He renounced the glamour of riches, treated everyone as equals and called others to return to Gospel values through daily repentance, faithfulness to the true life of the Church, and humble and simple living.<sup>21</sup>

**St** Francis' underwent a radical conversion experience and an equally radical change in his way of life. As a merchant's son destined to run his father's business, Francis had everything worth hoping for in the eyes of the world. But much to the anger and disappointment of his parents, instead of continuing the family business, Francis chose to embrace a calling that would seek to honour the handiwork of the Creator. Gradually, Francis began to experience a deep kinship with the whole of humanity. In coming to model himself on the suffering and Risen Lord, Francis developed a particular regard for the poor and the marginalised.

**As** a crusader, Francis had a vision of Jesus challenging him to a completely new way of life. **'Francis, who can do more for you, the master or the servant?'**, to which Francis replied, **'the Master.'** To give up a military career was a sign of cowardice, but Francis was convinced that God was calling him in a completely new direction. Francis began to deeply experience and appreciate what he had previously feared and chosen to ignore.<sup>22</sup>

**Three significant events** in Francis' life may help us to understand his voluntary poverty of heart. On a pilgrimage to St Peter's Basilica in Rome, Thomas of Celano, Francis' earliest biographer writes that Francis exchanged his expensive clothing for those of a beggar. Wanting to experience what it was like to be poor, he lived with poor pilgrims who were worshipping

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<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace. The Human Person, the Heart of Peace." n. 4

<sup>20</sup> XVI Pope Benedict, "Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth)," 29 June, 2009. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_enc\\_20090629\\_caritas-in-veritate\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html). n. 7

<sup>21</sup> Jim Considine, "A Green Saint. St Francis of Assisi," *The Common Good* Spring 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Renzo Allegri, "St Francis' Conversion," *Messenger of St Anthony* October 2006.

[http://www.messengersaintanthony.com/messaggero/pagina\\_articolo.asp?IDX=342IDRX=98](http://www.messengersaintanthony.com/messaggero/pagina_articolo.asp?IDX=342IDRX=98).

at the steps of St Peter's, by begging with them for alms for a few days. Francis wanted to truly understand the plight of the poor, for he had learnt that Christ's Church belongs to them.<sup>23</sup>

**In a second incident**, Francis embraced poverty itself. '[A]mong all the horrors of the human condition, the one Francis feared most was leprosy.' Leprosy sufferers had to live away from the main community on the outskirts of the cities, because people were afraid of contracting their disease and could not face their unsightly and stinking sores. In Francis' world, anyone with leprosy represented the poorest, most helpless, and most despised person in society.<sup>24</sup>

**While** riding one day, Francis encountered a man with leprosy. So fearful of the sight, he immediately rode away, but was then struck with remorse. He did what he had never done before. He returned, gave the man some money, hugged and kissed him, and then left, his heart pounding with gladness. As he looked back to say goodbye, mysteriously the man had disappeared. **Francis** immediately recalled the Gospel passage, 'I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.', and realised that God had appeared to him in the guise of the man with leprosy.<sup>25</sup> Just before Francis died, he wrote in his Testament, that before he had embraced the life of the Gospel the sight of anyone with leprosy repulsed him. He recalled that God guided him to offer comfort and compassion, and that every time he extended God's love to the least of God's family, God blessed him in body and soul.<sup>26</sup>

**A third experience** that changed Francis' heart was when he entered the little church of San Damiano to pray. The church was abandoned and run down. God spoke to him from the San Damiano crucifix, saying, 'Francis, go and rebuild my house which is falling into ruins.' Francis immediately set about repairing the church, but gradually he came understood the deeper meaning of God's words. The Church that God had reminded him about was much more than buildings. God was calling him to reform the very life of the people of God and to affirm the dignity of each human being.<sup>27</sup> The story and stages of Francis' conversion are the essence of the Franciscan movement today in the many different communities that model themselves on the Gospel by upholding the beauty of God in Creation.

#### **Let us share in this prayer:**

**Francis** you led people to a Gospel life away from pride, envy and ambition. You learnt from the Saviour who entered the world poor, despised and rejected and who overcame suffering in his triumph on the Cross. **Your** own poverty of heart challenges us to follow the Greatest Commandment: to love God with all our heart, our soul and our might and to truly love our neighbour as ourselves. **In** our own lives, may we constantly turn towards the good, seek the good of others, and as servants of the Church, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, extend our hearts towards peace and unity in our world.

**Let** us now listen to Francis' own reflection on poverty of heart through the Lord's Prayer.<sup>28</sup>

[At this time, play the following 'Youtube' video: Mapollo. "The Lord's Prayer - a Paraphrase by St Francis of Assisi." 2009. Available at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd2AJntKJWc> ]

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Francis, *The Writings of St Francis of Assisi. The Testament of St Francis.*

<sup>27</sup> Allegri, "St Francis' Conversion."

<sup>28</sup> Mapollo, "The Lord's Prayer - a Paraphrase by St Francis of Assisi," (Jan 11 2009. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd2AJntKJWc>).

**Reader 4:**

**Planet**

**Human** progress has led to many improvements to the way people live. It has also led to serious environmental and social problems at a global and local level.

**Pope** Benedict captures the false hopes of humanity and the elusive dreams of a better world in *Caritas in Veritate*. Many pursue happiness by taking ownership of the gifts of God's creation, as if those gifts were to be used as ends in themselves. This problem is both a moral and an ethical one. Humanity can only be true to itself and the wider world with which we are connected, when it comes to a clear understanding of truth. This way of thinking becomes clear through the writings of Pope Benedict's predecessor, **Pope** John Paul II, who tells us that modern-day struggles lie at the heart of our moral conscience<sup>29</sup> and that it is through our conscience that we find salvation.<sup>30</sup> **Our** conscience is God's gift to help us to understand the truth,<sup>31</sup> by which we choose what is good from what is evil.<sup>32</sup> Our choices can be genuinely in error, but we can also be blinded to the truth.<sup>33</sup> Our right to decide right from wrong, is not of its own making and is always in need of education through the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>34</sup> **Many**, in the absence of faith or an improperly informed faith make choices as if conscience is our own creation and has rights over itself. The modern media machine portrays choices as having their own truth and truth is how we see it. What is right and wrong is relative, and despite the dilemmas and conflicts of moral conscience, nothing is absolute.

**In** response, the Church reminds us that God is truth, and our conscience directs us to the truth through Jesus Christ who came to testify to the truth<sup>35</sup> and who leads us the way to God as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life'.<sup>36</sup>

**A** false understanding of truth disconnects the human family from each other and from the earth in which we all share. Human rights are violated through abortion, euthanasia, torture, slavery, prostitution, subhuman living and working conditions. **Abortion**, euthanasia, contraceptive practices and new birth technologies such as **In vitro fertilisation** disregard God's plan for human beings who are intricately made in the image and likeness of the Creator.<sup>37</sup> **Deforestation** destroys animal and plant life and climate change interferes with the delicate ecological balance of all life on God's earth.

**In** *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict reminds us that the environment is a gift to people, and the use of it involves a shared responsibility for all humanity. A turning away from spiritual values reduces this shared responsibility.<sup>38</sup> The gift of human freedom abuses the resources of the earth in which the human family shares, and in which we are to be stewards of God's creation. Life is a gift which is not at our disposal<sup>39</sup> and disregard for the environment and human coexistence always harms the other (n 8).<sup>40</sup> Pope Benedict gets to the heart of the matter when he says:

*"If there is a lack of respect for the right to life and to a natural death, if human conception, gestation and birth are made artificial, if human embryos are sacrificed to research, the conscience of society ends up losing the concept of human ecology"*

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<sup>29</sup> Il Pope John Paul, "Veritatis Splendor (the Splendor of Truth)," 6 Aug, 1993. Retrieved from [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_06081993\\_veritatis-splendor\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor_en.html). n. 1

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. n. 3

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. n. 54

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. n. 60

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. n. 62

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. n. 55

<sup>35</sup> Jn 18.37

<sup>36</sup> Jn 14.6

<sup>37</sup> Gen 1.26

<sup>38</sup> Pope John Paul, "Veritatis Splendor (the Splendor of Truth)." n. 3

<sup>39</sup> Pope Benedict, "Caritas in Veritate (Love in Truth)." n. 4

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. n. 8

and, along with it, that of environmental ecology. It is contradictory to insist that future generations respect the natural environment when our educational systems and laws do not help them to respect themselves.<sup>41</sup>

In keeping with the Genesis story it is for us to exercise dominion over the earth by 'tilling it and keeping it', rather than exploiting the world which is our home by seeking to dominate it.<sup>42</sup>

A Franciscan response to these bewildering problems is based on peace and goodwill. The joy that Francis had for creation has inspired the Franciscan movement towards maintaining human rights and care of the planet. Francis' Cantic of the Creatures, written in 1225, is a living witness to the teachings of the Church today on care for each other and care of our planet. One year before his death, Francis passionately recorded for posterity a reverence for a fraternity of all created things. The Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord, who orchestrates the drama of all life, is to receive all praise. Brother Sun, beautiful and radiant, bears the likeness of the Most High God. Sister Moon and the stars, Brothers Wind and Air, Sister Water and Brother Fire, are preciously and intricately inter-woven. Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, is to be graciously honoured, and within the symphony of life are all those who breathe forgiveness, and bear sickness and trial in the pursuit of peace. Those who die having faithfully lived their trials and sufferings according to the will of the Creator are comforted by Sister Death. The prayer ends with the earnest hope that all may thankfully see God's design in all creation.

So, what can we learn in particular from the Cantic of the Creatures in our modern world?

*'The Cantic of Brother Sun is a charter of peace. It is a charter of creaturely rights: human, animal, vegetable and mineral. The most basic meaning of peace is being at home with all creatures, loving all life, reverencing all creation. The Cantic has a message of peace for all nations and every person.'* – Eric Doyle OFM

If we recognise that our Creator God is the Giver of gifts, and that we are those who receive and gratefully accept those gifts, the Holy Spirit of God's love is poured forth, in a healing of self and society from all that ails it, for it is our healing that begins to empower us to find ways to solve many of the economic, social and political problems around us. When we recognise from St Bonaventure, the great Franciscan theologian, that all life is a mirror of God, we may be motivated to recognise the love of God in others and work towards true human development. The trace of God is found in all created things. The image of God is contained within human beings, and shining examples of God's love are those who bear a likeness to God.<sup>43</sup>

Shortly we will close with a Franciscan hymn, in honour of Francis' Cantic of the Creatures. But before we do that, let us end our Reflection on Francis' contribution to our modern world in some quiet reflection. As we reflect in prayer on the bounteous wonder of God's creation that surrounds us, we are invited to respond in the solitude of our own hearts to a number of questions that will be displayed before us ...

[A sequence of questions is displayed on the Powerpoint. The congregation reads these in silence. The suggested time lapse for each is 10-15 seconds.]

Soon we will end with Evening Prayer together. But before we do that we would now invite you to stand whilst we sing the hymn 'All Creatures of our God and King' that St Francis is believed to have composed.

[The words for the hymn 'All Creatures of our God and King' appear on the Powerpoint. At the conclusion of the hymn, say ...]

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid. n. 51

<sup>42</sup> XVI Pope Benedict, "Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace. If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation," 2010. [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_mes\\_20091208\\_xliii-world-day-peace\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliii-world-day-peace_en.html). n. 6

<sup>43</sup> O.S.F. Ilia Delio, O.F.M. Keith Douglass Warner, and Pamela Wood, *Care for Creation. A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth* (Cincinnati, Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008): 44

'Would you please be seated? The Holy Spirit Fraternity of the Secular Franciscans thank you for joining us in this time of reflection on the Spirituality of St Francis today. We will conclude with Evening Prayer. Following Evening Prayer we invite you to enjoy food and fellowship with us in the Parish foyer.'

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