



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

In this Easter season, despite the restrictions resultant from the Covid-19 epidemic, we see the glorious springtime when all of nature celebrates new birth and new life. Without gathering together physically, we have done our best to imitate the first disciples of Jesus who gathered for the apostles' instruction and the breaking of the bread; at least we are able to do so electronically and expand our understanding of community. This springtime and Easter season also includes both the annual commemoration of Earth Day and the fifth anniversary of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*.

If you haven't yet had a chance to read this powerful encyclical, perhaps those who are "staying healthy at home" could do so during this Easter season. What distinguishes this document from many other writings about climate change and the environment is that it presents the environment first and foremost as God's great work of creation. As part of God's magnificent handiwork, the earth and all it contains is given to the human family as our common home. From this perspective, Pope Francis invites us to take seriously the care of the earth as the care of our home. At the same time, this encyclical is a call to conversion. We are encouraged to understand the urgency of the need to change our ingrained patterns of consumption and how we see everything as disposable and become more conscious of sustainability and the common good.

Living in the wealthiest country on the globe, we have long been accustomed to having what we want and expecting the rest of the world to rise to our "standard of living". Often we have done so without regard for the exploitation of resources and the natural environment in some of the places that we have considered "underdeveloped". Pope Francis reminds us, not only in the United States but in all of the wealthiest nations, that we have even developed an attitude of "disposability" towards human beings: the unborn, the elderly, the chronically ill and the poor. The conversion to which Pope Francis calls us is about overcoming what he has termed the globalization of indifference.

It probably shouldn't surprise us that this encyclical has met the strongest opposition in the United States. It has been characterized as a political document and rejected because of its appreciation for science and for not being a purely spiritual document. Any honest reading of this encyclical will discover the deep spirituality of this development of Catholic social teaching on the environment. It is a spirituality inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi and the *Canticle of the Sun* that he wrote some 800 years ago, recognizing all of creation as brother and sister in the great fraternity that God has created. It is precisely this interconnection of all creation that celebrates the magnificence of God's work and calls us to ongoing conversion towards our responsibility for all of creation.

It is fair to say that many people who do not need to be convinced of the climate crisis feel overwhelmed by the frightening data and experience a kind of helplessness in the face of such monumental problems. Pope Francis invites all people, but especially people of faith, to realize that by changes of lifestyle, by gaining a deeper understanding, by advocating for policy changes, by a greater awareness of our patterns of consumption and a more profound appreciation of our interconnectedness, we can contribute to the healing of our planet. By taking a critical look at our dependence upon technology and seeking the solution to all of our problems through technology, we might rediscover the spiritual dimension of our existence that has been a casualty of our disposable attitude toward so many things.

In the Diocese of Lexington, first under the leadership of our beloved Glenmary Father John Rausch and now with the direction of Sister Kathleen Weigand of the Mount Tabor Benedictines, we have an active *Laudato Si* Commission which is at work through prayer, study and action to teach the spirituality of creation and help parishes, communities and individuals to help save our planet and embark on the path of the conversion which the encyclical teaches.

I am grateful for their work and encourage every member of our local Church to become engaged in the renewal and new life of a springtime and Easter for our planet.

Peace and all good,

Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv.
Bishop of Lexington