

4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2015  
Luke 5: 1-11

*Master, we have laboured all the night, and have nothing: but at thy word we will let down the net.  
And when they had done this, they enclosed a very great multitude of fishes...*

Jesus is the master, Simon the disciple.  
Disciples obey their master until through their own experience they discover what the master knows.

Simon is dubious.  
What Jesus asks is contrary to what Simon's past experience suggests, but Simon obeys.<sup>1</sup>

You and I have been asked to *launch out into the deep, and let down [our] nets...* by Jesus through the living Gospel to do so each day.  
But we were also asked to do so specifically this past Thursday when Pope Francis' encyclical, *Laudato Si, On Care for Our Common Home* was released.

Bishop Bradley issued his own reaction:

*In this most authoritative teaching, Pope Francis addresses one of the most critically important moral issues of our day, namely ecology and global warming...*

*As a good pastor, Pope Francis reminds us that our care for others and our care for the environment are integrally connected.*

*The Pope also warns that if we do not come together for action, our environment will deteriorate, which will have very serious implications for all humanity, most especially the poor and the vulnerable.*

*It is my great hope and prayer that all people will carefully read and prayerfully respond to Pope Francis' call for more responsible stewardship of the earth which has been entrusted into the care of the human family, and that we will work together to find solutions to protect and safeguard the environment and the beauty of our natural world for our children, grandchildren and generations still to come.*

*Bishop Paul Bradley*

What is at the center of the ecological debate concerning global warming is the assertion that climate change has been materially effected by human activity.

Others maintain that climate change is part of natural phenomena.

After extensive review of the research, Pope Francis states,  
*... a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases ... released mainly as a result of human activity.*

To have such a person of renown embrace one's side of the ecological debate must be a great encouragement for its advocates.

But, the Church does not claim to be an expert in scientific matters.

However, the Church does claim to be authoritative in moral and theological matters.

It is ultimately in this direction that Pope Francis takes his encyclical. He addresses the nature of man and the meaning of existence, of creation itself.

Stepping back to evaluate how Christian teaching has impacted humanity's relationship with the earth, Francis forcefully rejects any interpretation of Scriptures that would find men and women as "dominators" over nature. Human life, the pope writes, is grounded by three relationships -- those between God, neighbor and earth.

*"We are not God,"* he states.

*"The earth was here before us and it has been given to us."<sup>ii</sup>*

Addressing interpretations of the Genesis stories that give full license to humans to be domineering and destructive, the pope states:

*This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures.<sup>iii</sup>*

He says, *"In our time, the Church does not simply state that other creatures are completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish.*

Theologically, Pope Francis teaches that being made in the image of God means that we are responsible for the stewardship of creation.

I am reminded of the iconic image of Jesus' model of leadership: that of washing other's feet, of being at the service of others.

However, Pope Francis eschews extremism. He says,

*This is not to put all living beings on the same level nor to deprive human beings of their unique worth and the tremendous responsibility it entails. Nor does it imply a divinization of the earth which would prevent us from working on it and protecting it in its fragility.*

Yet, it is also a call to action with dire warnings about further delay.

*"Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain," he says. "We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth. The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet's capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes."*

Pope Francis understands this as a moral imperative. This has to do with how we fulfil the commandment to love God and neighbor.

Tying together ecological devastation with poverty, Francis says:  
*"The same mindset which stands in the way of making radical decisions to reverse the trend of global warming also stands in the way of achieving the goal of eliminating poverty. A more responsible overall approach is needed to deal with both problems: the reduction of pollution and the development of poorer countries and regions."*<sup>iv</sup>

Ultimately, *Laudato Si* is an authoritative moral and theological challenge by the Church. Using his chosen servant, God calls us to act. We are not allowed to sit this one out.

Our society is divided on our scientific understanding of the causes of global warming.

Some may even be dubious of the Pope's embrace of the position regarding man's contribution to climate change.

But we are theologically and morally challenged, as the very children of God, to be at the service of God's creation,

to be co-creators of the unfolding beauty that God intended and, ultimately, to protect the poorest and most vulnerable who find themselves most at risk of any degradation of our world.

No matter our own individual understanding of the science,  
we are called to be less taxing on our world,  
to reduce our pollution and  
to share the blessed resources of the world making them available,  
as our common birthright, to all.

Trust in God.

Trust in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit who called Pope Francis to be the  
Bishop of Rome and the servant of servants.

Like Simon, even if dubious of how it could even help,  
we are called to go out into the deep and cast our nets.

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<sup>i</sup> John Shea, *The Relentless Widow*, p. 38

<sup>ii</sup> <http://ncronline.org/news/theology/pope-francis-encyclical-urgent-call-prevent-world-debris-desolation-and-filth>

<sup>iii</sup> *ibid*

<sup>iv</sup> *ibid*