



ENCYCLICAL LETTER
LAUDATO SI'
OF THE HOLY FATHER
FRANCIS
ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME

74. The experience of the Babylonian captivity provoked a spiritual crisis which led to deeper faith in God. Now his creative omnipotence was given pride of place in order to exhort the people to regain their hope in the midst of their wretched predicament. Centuries later, in another age of trial and persecution, when the Roman Empire was seeking to impose absolute dominion, the faithful would once again find consolation and hope in a growing trust in the all-powerful God: "Great and wonderful are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways!" (*Rev* 15:3). The God who created the universe out of nothing can also intervene in this world and overcome every form of evil. Injustice is not invincible.

75. A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality.

III. THE MYSTERY OF THE UNIVERSE

76. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the word "creation" has a broader meaning than "nature",

for it has to do with God's loving plan in which every creature has its own value and significance. Nature is usually seen as a system which can be studied, understood and controlled, whereas creation can only be understood as a gift from the outstretched hand of the Father of all, and as a reality illuminated by the love which calls us together into universal communion.

77. "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (*Ps* 33:6). This tells us that the world came about as the result of a decision, not from chaos or chance, and this exalts it all the more. The creating word expresses a free choice. The universe did not emerge as the result of arbitrary omnipotence, a show of force or a desire for self-assertion. Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: "For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it" (*Wis* 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection. Saint Basil the Great described the Creator as "goodness without measure",⁴⁴ while Dante Alighieri spoke of "the love which moves

⁴⁴ *Hom. in Hexaemeron*, I, 2, 10: PG 29, 9.

the sun and the stars”.⁴⁵ Consequently, we can ascend from created things “to the greatness of God and to his loving mercy”.⁴⁶

78. At the same time, Judaeo-Christian thought demythologized nature. While continuing to admire its grandeur and immensity, it no longer saw nature as divine. In doing so, it emphasizes all the more our human responsibility for nature. This rediscovery of nature can never be at the cost of the freedom and responsibility of human beings who, as part of the world, have the duty to cultivate their abilities in order to protect it and develop its potential. If we acknowledge the value and the fragility of nature and, at the same time, our God-given abilities, we can finally leave behind the modern myth of unlimited material progress. A fragile world, entrusted by God to human care, challenges us to devise intelligent ways of directing, developing and limiting our power.

79. In this universe, shaped by open and intercommunicating systems, we can discern countless forms of relationship and participation. This leads us to think of the whole as open to God’s transcendence, within which it develops. Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding. We are free

⁴⁵ *The Divine Comedy, Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII, 145.

⁴⁶ BENEDICT XVI, *Catechesis* (9 November 2005), 3: *Insegnamenti* 1 (2005), 768.

to apply our intelligence towards things evolving positively, or towards adding new ills, new causes of suffering and real setbacks. This is what makes for the excitement and drama of human history, in which freedom, growth, salvation and love can blossom, or lead towards decadence and mutual destruction. The work of the Church seeks not only to remind everyone of the duty to care for nature, but at the same time “she must above all protect mankind from self-destruction”.⁴⁷

80. Yet God, who wishes to work with us and who counts on our cooperation, can also bring good out of the evil we have done. “The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, including the most complex and inscrutable”.⁴⁸ Creating a world in need of development, God in some way sought to limit himself in such a way that many of the things we think of as evils, dangers or sources of suffering, are in reality part of the pains of childbirth which he uses to draw us into the act of cooperation with the Creator.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ ID., Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009), 51: *AAS* 101 (2009), 687.

⁴⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis* (24 April 1991), 6: *Insegnamenti* 14 (1991), 856.

⁴⁹ The Catechism explains that God wished to create a world which is “journeying towards its ultimate perfection”, and that this implies the presence of imperfection and physical evil; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 310.

God is intimately present to each being, without impinging on the autonomy of his creature, and this gives rise to the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs.⁵⁰ His divine presence, which ensures the subsistence and growth of each being, “continues the work of creation”.⁵¹ The Spirit of God has filled the universe with possibilities and therefore, from the very heart of things, something new can always emerge: “Nature is nothing other than a certain kind of art, namely God’s art, impressed upon things, whereby those things are moved to a determinate end. It is as if a shipbuilder were able to give timbers the wherewithal to move themselves to take the form of a ship”.⁵²

81. Human beings, even if we postulate a process of evolution, also possess a uniqueness which cannot be fully explained by the evolution of other open systems. Each of us has his or her own personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the

⁵⁰ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 36.

⁵¹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 104, art. 1 ad 4.

⁵² ID., *In octo libros Physicorum Aristotelis expositio*, Lib. II, lectio 14.

spheres of physics and biology. The sheer novelty involved in the emergence of a personal being within a material universe presupposes a direct action of God and a particular call to life and to relationship on the part of a “Thou” who addresses himself to another “thou”. The biblical accounts of creation invite us to see each human being as a subject who can never be reduced to the status of an object.

82. Yet it would also be mistaken to view other living beings as mere objects subjected to arbitrary human domination. When nature is viewed solely as a source of profit and gain, this has serious consequences for society. This vision of “might is right” has engendered immense inequality, injustice and acts of violence against the majority of humanity, since resources end up in the hands of the first comer or the most powerful: the winner takes all. Completely at odds with this model are the ideals of harmony, justice, fraternity and peace as proposed by Jesus. As he said of the powers of his own age: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (*Mt 20:25-26*).

83. The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the

maturity of all things.⁵³ Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

IV. THE MESSAGE OF EACH CREATURE IN THE HARMONY OF CREATION

84. Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those

⁵³ Against this horizon we can set the contribution of Fr Teilhard de Chardin; cf. PAUL VI, *Address in a Chemical and Pharmaceutical Plant* (24 February 1966): *Insegnamenti* 4 (1966), 992-993; JOHN PAUL II, *Letter to the Reverend George Coyne* (1 June 1988): *Insegnamenti* 11/2 (1988), 1715; BENEDICT XVI, *Homily for the Celebration of Vespers in Aosta* (24 July 2009): *Insegnamenti* 5/2 (2009), 60.

memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves.

85. God has written a precious book, “whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe”.⁵⁴ The Canadian bishops rightly pointed out that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God: “From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine”.⁵⁵ The bishops of Japan, for their part, made a thought-provoking observation: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope”.⁵⁶ This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since “for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice”.⁵⁷ We can say that “alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in sa-

⁵⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis* (30 January 2002), 6: *Insegnamenti* 25/1 (2002), 140.

⁵⁵ CANADIAN CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMISSION, Pastoral Letter *You Love All that Exists... All Things are Yours, God, Lover of Life*” (4 October 2003), 1.

⁵⁶ CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE OF JAPAN, *Reverence for Life. A Message for the Twenty-First Century* (1 January 2000), 89.

⁵⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis* (26 January 2000), 5: *Insegnamenti* 23/1 (2000), 123.

cred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night”.⁵⁸ Paying attention to this manifestation, we learn to see ourselves in relation to all other creatures: “I express myself in expressing the world; in my effort to decipher the sacredness of the world, I explore my own”.⁵⁹

86. The universe as a whole, in all its manifold relationships, shows forth the inexhaustible riches of God. Saint Thomas Aquinas wisely noted that multiplicity and variety “come from the intention of the first agent” who willed that “what was wanting to one in the representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another”,⁶⁰ inasmuch as God’s goodness “could not be represented fittingly by any one creature”.⁶¹ Hence we need to grasp the variety of things in their multiple relationships.⁶² We understand better the importance and meaning of each creature if we contemplate it within the entirety of God’s plan. As the Catechism teaches: “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no crea-

⁵⁸ ID., *Catechesis* (2 August 2000), 3: *Insegnamenti* 23/2 (2000), 112.

⁵⁹ PAUL RICOEUR, *Philosophie de la Volonté, t. II: Finitude et Culpabilité*, Paris, 2009, 216.

⁶⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 47, art. 1.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Cf. *Ibid.*, art. 2, ad 1; art. 3.

ture is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other”.⁶³

87. When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun,
who is the day
and through whom you give us light.
And he is beautiful and radiant
with great splendour;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.
Praised be you, my Lord,
through Sister Moon and the stars,
in heaven you formed them clear
and precious and beautiful.
Praised be you, my Lord,
through Brother Wind,
and through the air, cloudy and serene,
and every kind of weather
through whom you give sustenance
to your creatures.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who is very useful and humble
and precious and chaste.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom you light the night,

⁶³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 340.

and he is beautiful and playful
and robust and strong”.⁶⁴

88. The bishops of Brazil have pointed out that nature as a whole not only manifests God but is also a locus of his presence. The Spirit of life dwells in every living creature and calls us to enter into relationship with him.⁶⁵ Discovering this presence leads us to cultivate the “ecological virtues”.⁶⁶ This is not to forget that there is an infinite distance between God and the things of this world, which do not possess his fullness. Otherwise, we would not be doing the creatures themselves any good either, for we would be failing to acknowledge their right and proper place. We would end up unduly demanding of them something which they, in their smallness, cannot give us.

V. A UNIVERSAL COMMUNION

89. The created things of this world are not free of ownership: “For they are yours, O Lord, who love the living” (*Wis* 11:26). This is the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind

⁶⁴ *Canticle of the Creatures*, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, New York-London-Manila, 1999, 113-114.

⁶⁵ Cf. NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF THE BISHOPS OF BRAZIL, *A Igreja e a Questão Ecológica*, 1992, 53-54.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others. That is why the New Zealand bishops asked what the commandment “Thou shalt not kill” means when “twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive”.⁷⁸

VII. THE GAZE OF JESUS

96. Jesus took up the biblical faith in God the Creator, emphasizing a fundamental truth: God is Father (cf. *Mt* 11:25). In talking with his disciples, Jesus would invite them to recognize the paternal relationship God has with all his creatures. With moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God’s eyes: “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God” (*Lk* 12:6). “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them” (*Mt* 6:26).

97. The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder. As he made his way throughout the

⁷⁸ NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE, *Statement on Environmental Issues* (1 September 2006).

land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father, and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things: “Lift up your eyes, and see how the fields are already white for harvest” (*Jn* 4:35). “The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed which a man took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all seeds, but once it has grown, it is the greatest of plants” (*Mt* 13:31-32).

98. Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (*Mt* 8:27). His appearance was not that of an ascetic set apart from the world, nor of an enemy to the pleasant things of life. Of himself he said: “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say, ‘Look, a glutton and a drunkard!’” (*Mt* 11:19). He was far removed from philosophies which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. Such unhealthy dualisms, nonetheless, left a mark on certain Christian thinkers in the course of history and disfigured the Gospel. Jesus worked with his hands, in daily contact with the matter created by God, to which he gave form by his craftsmanship. It is striking that most of his life was dedicated to this task in a simple life which awakened no admiration at all: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (*Mk* 6:3). In this way he sanctified human labour and endowed it with a special significance for our development. As Saint John Paul II taught, “by enduring the toil

of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity”.⁷⁹

99. In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: “All things have been created through him and for him” (*Col* 1:16).⁸⁰ The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ’s creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word “became flesh” (*Jn* 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross. From the beginning of the world, but particularly through the incarnation, the mystery of Christ is at work in a hidden manner in the natural world as a whole, without thereby impinging on its autonomy.

100. The New Testament does not only tell us of the earthly Jesus and his tangible and loving relationship with the world. It also shows him risen and glorious, present throughout creation by his universal Lordship: “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of

⁷⁹ Encyclical Letter *Laborem Exercens* (14 September 1981), 27: *AAS* 73 (1981), 645.

⁸⁰ Hence Saint Justin could speak of “seeds of the Word” in the world; cf. *II Apologia* 8, 1-2; 13, 3-6: PG 6, 457-458, 467.

his cross” (*Col* 1:19-20). This leads us to direct our gaze to the end of time, when the Son will deliver all things to the Father, so that “God may be everything to every one” (*1 Cor* 15:28). Thus, the creatures of this world no longer appear to us under merely natural guise because the risen One is mysteriously holding them to himself and directing them towards fullness as their end. The very flowers of the field and the birds which his human eyes contemplated and admired are now imbued with his radiant presence.

gift of God – can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed, and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life”.¹⁴⁹ In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say “thank you” as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings.

214. Political institutions and various other social groups are also entrusted with helping to raise people’s awareness. So too is the Church. All Christian communities have an important role to play in ecological education. It is my hope that our seminaries and houses of formation will provide an education in responsible simplicity of life, in grateful contemplation of God’s world, and in concern for the needs of the poor and the protection of the environment. Because the

¹⁴⁹ JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* (1 May 1991), 39: *AAS* 83 (1991), 842.

stakes are so high, we need institutions empowered to impose penalties for damage inflicted on the environment. But we also need the personal qualities of self-control and willingness to learn from one another.

215. In this regard, “the relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked”.¹⁵⁰ By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour. Our efforts at education will be inadequate and ineffectual unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the paradigm of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market.

III. ECOLOGICAL CONVERSION

216. The rich heritage of Christian spirituality, the fruit of twenty centuries of personal and communal experience, has a precious contribu-

¹⁵⁰ ID., *Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, 14: AAS 82 (1990), 155.

tion to make to the renewal of humanity. Here, I would like to offer Christians a few suggestions for an ecological spirituality grounded in the convictions of our faith, since the teachings of the Gospel have direct consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. More than in ideas or concepts as such, I am interested in how such a spirituality can motivate us to a more passionate concern for the protection of our world. A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, without a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without an “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity”.¹⁵¹ Admittedly, Christians have not always appropriated and developed the spiritual treasures bestowed by God upon the Church, where the life of the spirit is not dissociated from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us.

217. “The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast”.¹⁵² For this reason, the ecological crisis is also a summons to profound interior conversion. It must be said that some committed and prayerful Christians, with the excuse of real-

¹⁵¹ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 Nov 2013), 261: *AAS* 105 (2013), 1124.

¹⁵² BENEDICT XVI, *Homily for the Solemn Inauguration of the Petrine Ministry* (24 April 2005): *AAS* 97 (2005), 710.

ism and pragmatism, tend to ridicule expressions of concern for the environment. Others are passive; they choose not to change their habits and thus become inconsistent. So what they all need is an “ecological conversion”, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them. Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.

218. In calling to mind the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi, we come to realize that a healthy relationship with creation is one dimension of overall personal conversion, which entails the recognition of our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to heartfelt repentance and desire to change. The Australian bishops spoke of the importance of such conversion for achieving reconciliation with creation: “To achieve such reconciliation, we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart”.¹⁵³

219. Nevertheless, self-improvement on the part of individuals will not by itself remedy the extremely complex situation facing our world to-

¹⁵³ AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, *A New Earth – The Environmental Challenge* (2002).

day. Isolated individuals can lose their ability and freedom to escape the utilitarian mindset, and end up prey to an unethical consumerism bereft of social or ecological awareness. Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds. This task “will make such tremendous demands of man that he could never achieve it by individual initiative or even by the united effort of men bred in an individualistic way. The work of dominating the world calls for a union of skills and a unity of achievement that can only grow from quite a different attitude”.¹⁵⁴ The ecological conversion needed to bring about lasting change is also a community conversion.

220. This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God’s loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works: “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (*Mt* 6:3-4). It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with

¹⁵⁴ ROMANO GUARDINI, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, 72 (*The End of the Modern World*, 65-66).

which the Father has linked us to all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems and in offering ourselves to God "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable" (*Rom* 12:1). We do not understand our superiority as a reason for personal glory or irresponsible dominion, but rather as a different capacity which, in its turn, entails a serious responsibility stemming from our faith.

221. Various convictions of our faith, developed at the beginning of this Encyclical can help us to enrich the meaning of this conversion. These include the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us, and the security that Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light. Then too, there is the recognition that God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore. We read in the Gospel that Jesus says of the birds of the air that "not one of them is forgotten before God" (*Lk* 12:6). How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm? I ask all Christians to recognize and to live fully this dimension of their conversion. May the power and the light of the grace we have received also be evident in our relationship to other creatures and to the world

around us. In this way, we will help nurture that sublime fraternity with all creation which Saint Francis of Assisi so radiantly embodied.

IV. JOY AND PEACE

222. Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. We need to take up an ancient lesson, found in different religious traditions and also in the Bible. It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment. To be serenely present to each reality, however small it may be, opens us to much greater horizons of understanding and personal fulfilment. Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack. This implies avoiding the dynamic of dominion and the mere accumulation of pleasures.

223. Such sobriety, when lived freely and consciously, is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those

promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.

VI. SACRAMENTAL SIGNS AND THE CELEBRATION OF REST

233. The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face.¹⁵⁹ The ideal is

¹⁵⁹ The spiritual writer Ali al-Khawas stresses from his own experience the need not to put too much distance between the creatures of the world and the interior experience of God. As he puts it: "Prejudice should not have us criticize those who seek ecstasy in music or poetry. There is a subtle mystery in

not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things. Saint Bonaventure teaches us that “contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God’s grace within our hearts, and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves”.¹⁶⁰

234. Saint John of the Cross taught that all the goodness present in the realities and experiences of this world “is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God”.¹⁶¹ This is not because the finite things of this world are really divine, but because the mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that “all things are God”.¹⁶² Standing awe-struck before a mountain, he or she cannot separate this experience from God, and perceives that the interior awe being lived has to be entrusted to the Lord: “Mountains have heights and they are plentiful, vast, beautiful, graceful, bright and fragrant. These mountains are what my Beloved is to me. Lonely valleys are quiet, pleasant, cool,

each of the movements and sounds of this world. The initiate will capture what is being said when the wind blows, the trees sway, water flows, flies buzz, doors creak, birds sing, or in the sound of strings or flutes, the sighs of the sick, the groans of the afflicted...” (EVA DE VITRAY-MEYEROVITCH [ed.], *Anthologie du soufisme*, Paris 1978, 200).

¹⁶⁰ *In II Sent.*, 23, 2, 3.

¹⁶¹ *Cántico Espiritual*, XIV, 5.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

shady and flowing with fresh water; in the variety of their groves and in the sweet song of the birds, they afford abundant recreation and delight to the senses, and in their solitude and silence, they refresh us and give rest. These valleys are what my Beloved is to me”.¹⁶³

235. The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. The hand that blesses is an instrument of God’s love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ, who came to accompany us on the journey of life. Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life. Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature. This is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East. “Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colours, in the lights, in the scents”.¹⁶⁴ For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, XIV, 6-7.

¹⁶⁴ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Letter *Orientalis Lumen* (2 May 1995), 11: *AAS* 87 (1995), 757.

true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation. “Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world’s salvation”.¹⁶⁵

236. It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love: “Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the al-

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

tar of the world”.¹⁶⁶ The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, “creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself”.¹⁶⁷ Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation.

237. On Sunday, our participation in the Eucharist has special importance. Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. Sunday is the day of the Resurrection, the “first day” of the new creation, whose first fruits are the Lord’s risen humanity, the pledge of the final transfiguration of all created reality. It also proclaims “man’s eternal rest in God”.¹⁶⁸ In this way, Christian spirituality incorporates the value of relaxation and festivity. We tend to demean contemplative rest as something unproductive and unnecessary, but this is to do away with the very thing which is most important about work: its meaning. We

¹⁶⁶ ID., Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 8: *AAS* 95 (2003), 438.

¹⁶⁷ BENEDICT XVI, *Homily for the Mass of Corpus Domini* (15 June 2006): *AAS* 98 (2006), 513.

¹⁶⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2175.

are called to include in our work a dimension of receptivity and gratuity, which is quite different from mere inactivity. Rather, it is another way of working, which forms part of our very essence. It protects human action from becoming empty activism; it also prevents that unfettered greed and sense of isolation which make us seek personal gain to the detriment of all else. The law of weekly rest forbade work on the seventh day, “so that your ox and your donkey may have rest, and the son of your maidservant, and the stranger, may be refreshed” (*Ex* 23:12). Rest opens our eyes to the larger picture and gives us renewed sensitivity to the rights of others. And so the day of rest, centred on the Eucharist, sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.

VII. THE TRINITY AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATURES

238. The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accord-

ance with his own personal property. Consequently, “when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity”.¹⁶⁹

239. For Christians, believing in one God who is trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation. Saint Bonaventure went so far as to say that human beings, before sin, were able to see how each creature “testifies that God is three”. The reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in nature “when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened”.¹⁷⁰ The Franciscan saint teaches us that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. In this way, he points out to us the challenge of trying to read reality in a Trinitarian key.

240. The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven re-

¹⁶⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis* (2 August 2000), 4: *Insegnamenti* 23/2 (2000), 112.

¹⁷⁰ *Quaest. Disp. de Myst. Trinitatis*, 1, 2 concl.

relationships.¹⁷¹ This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfillment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity.

VIII. QUEEN OF ALL CREATION

241. Mary, the Mother who cared for Jesus, now cares with maternal affection and pain for this wounded world. Just as her pierced heart mourned the death of Jesus, so now she grieves for the sufferings of the crucified poor and for the creatures of this world laid waste by human power. Completely transfigured, she now lives with Jesus, and all creatures sing of her fairness. She is the Woman, “clothed in the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars” (*Rev* 12:1). Carried up into heaven, she is the Mother and Queen of all creation. In her glorified body, together with the Risen Christ, part of creation has reached the fullness of its beauty. She

¹⁷¹ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 11, art. 3; q. 21, art. 1, ad 3; q. 47, art. 3.

pose that we offer two prayers. The first we can share with all who believe in a God who is the all-powerful Creator, while in the other we Christians ask for inspiration to take up the commitment to creation set before us by the Gospel of Jesus.

A prayer for our earth

All-powerful God,
you are present in the whole universe
and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.
O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned
and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty,
not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.

Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace.

A Christian prayer in union with creation

Father, we praise you with all your creatures.
They came forth from your all-powerful hand;
they are yours, filled with your presence and your
tender love.

Praise be to you!

Son of God, Jesus,
through you all things were made.
You were formed in the womb of Mary our
Mother,
you became part of this earth,
and you gazed upon this world with human eyes.
Today you are alive in every creature
in your risen glory.

Praise be to you!

Holy Spirit, by your light
you guide this world towards the Father's love
and accompany creation as it groans in travail.
You also dwell in our hearts
and you inspire us to do what is good.

Praise be to you!

Triune Lord,
wondrous community of infinite love,
teach us to contemplate you
in the beauty of the universe,
for all things speak of you.
Awaken our praise and thankfulness

for every being that you have made.
Give us the grace to feel profoundly joined
to everything that is.

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels of your love
for all the creatures of this earth,
for not one of them is forgotten in your sight.
Enlighten those who possess power and money
that they may avoid the sin of indifference,
that they may love the common good,
advance the weak,
and care for this world in which we live.
The poor and the earth are crying out.
O Lord, seize us with your power and light,
help us to protect all life,
to prepare for a better future,
for the coming of your Kingdom
of justice, peace, love and beauty.
Praise be to you!
Amen.

Given in Rome at Saint Peter's on 24 May,
the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 2015, the
third of my Pontificate.

Franciscus