



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

Reflection on the 5th Anniversary of *Laudato Si*

There is a lovely, devotional hymn to Our Lady, titled, “Bring flowers of the rarest”, which was often sung when I was a child. It is still sung in many schools and churches today, during the month of May. The second verse goes like this:

*Their lady they name thee,
Their mistress proclaim thee,
Ah, grant that thy children on earth be as true
as long as the bowers
are radiant with flowers,
as long as the azure shall keep its bright hue*

This hymn draws a close connection between the praise of God, through Mary during the month of May, and the state of God’s creation. We must confess, that ‘the bowers’ are not as radiant with flowers as they once were, and the sky’s azure blue has indeed lost some of its hue, due to our polluting of the earth. The hymn is a reminder of the intimate connection between God, the beauty of the world He created, and all of us. If we lose the sense of one of these, then we lose the sense of the others, too.

It is fitting that we recall these connections this week, as we mark the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si* - Praise be to you - the Encyclical letter of Pope Francis.

We know this is the first time in our history that a Pope has taken the name Francis, after St Francis of Assisi. The spirit and vision of the saint is evident throughout the Pope’s letter. There are two ideas which especially permeate what Pope Francis teaches us. The first is the idea of “our common home”. Our earth is the home for the human family. It is in severe danger and needs immediate protection and healing at a global, national and local level. The second idea is that while the threatened state of the environment is a universal challenge affecting us all, those most in danger at present, and in the future, are those who are already poor and vulnerable.

The Pope constantly links these two realities throughout the letter; the need to protect and respect “our Common home” and the need to respect and protect the

dignity and lives of the poor. Both themes have been evident since the beginning of Pope Francis's pontificate. We have seen this in the priorities which the Pope asks us to have.

"Laudato Si" is permeated by a sense of human, moral and religious urgency, but the Pope recognizes the complexity of the joining of the environment and poverty. "We are not faced", he says, "with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental" (#139).

For me, *Laudato Si* needs to be read not only as a work of Catholic social teaching, but also as an example of proclaiming our faith anew. It is an important contribution to the work of the New Evangelization. The letter reflects a profound confidence and openness to the world. Pope Francis draws on an ecumenical and interdisciplinary range of authorities — from scientists, saints and theologians to international agencies; from other world religious leaders to previous popes and Catholic bishops' conferences in every continent. He even quotes a Sufi mystic in one of his footnotes!

He understands that in the modern world, the Church's message needs a new hearing. It needs a fresh presentation rooted in the concrete realities of our times. In today's secular society, in which the idea of God is either rejected or seen as irrelevant, Pope Francis understands that the Gospel and the Church must find new ways to capture people's imaginations. Otherwise, "theological and philosophical reflections on the situation of humanity and the world can sound tiresome and abstract," he reminds us.

It is perhaps for this reason that the Pope does not mention the name of Jesus until he is almost 13,000 words into this long document. But "the gaze of Jesus" is at the heart of what he says. In passages filled with quotations from the Gospel, the Pope writes of Jesus as a man of work and a man who "lived in full harmony with all creation." "In talking with his disciples," the pope writes, "with moving tenderness he would remind them that each one of them is important in God's eyes. ... As he made his way throughout the land, he often stopped to contemplate the beauty sown by his Father and invited his disciples to perceive a divine message in things."

In the name of Jesus, Pope Francis is issuing a call to conversion. This is a call for all of us to look at the earth and all its creatures with the eyes of Jesus. Because "the earthly Jesus" is also the Creator and Lord of the universe, the world has been transfigured. The pope writes: "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.”

So, this week, from 16th to 24th May, I invite you to mark this fifth anniversary of *Laudato si* in any way you can. There are a variety of resources available online, provided both by *Caritas Plymouth* and *CAFOD Plymouth*. Just go to the CAFOD website, to the *Caritas Plymouth* website or to our Plymouth Diocesan Facebook page. There is also the specially dedicated website simply titled, *Laudato Si*.

Let us especially become more familiar with the many things that are already happening in our parishes and schools regarding *Laudato Si*. Daily, during this week, let us join in the 5th anniversary prayer, composed by the Pontifical Council for Integral Development, and with which I now conclude these words.

Loving God,
Creator of heaven and earth and all that is in them,
You created us in your image and made us stewards of all your creation, of our common home.
You blessed us with the sun, water and bountiful land so that all might be nourished.
Open our minds and touch our hearts,
so that we may attend to your gift of creation.
Help us to be conscious that our common home belongs not only to us,
but to all future generations, and that it is our responsibility to preserve it.
May we help each person secure the food and resources that they need.
Be present to those in need in these trying times,
especially the poorest and those most at risk of being left behind.
Transform our fear, anxiety and feelings of isolation into hope
so that we may experience a true conversion of the heart.
Help us to show creative solidarity
in addressing the consequences of this global pandemic.
Make us courageous to embrace the changes
that are needed in search of the common good.
Now more than ever, may we feel that we are all interconnected,
in our efforts to lift up the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.
We make our prayer through Christ our Lord. Amen

+Mark O'Toole
Bishop of Plymouth