

*By the word of the Lord
the heavens were made*

Psalm 33:6

LAUDATO SI' WEEK 14 - 24 MAY

Laudato Si' was published on 24 May 2015. In the years since then, much has happened in our world to reinforce both the timeliness and prophetic nature of *Laudato Si'*. It may be time to revisit some of the main messages from *Laudato Si'*. In October 2020, *Fratelli Tutti* was published which expands much of the content of *Laudato Si'*. These two papal social encyclicals offer insights about how we relate to each other, to all of creation and to God; and what happens when those relationships rupture; and what is possible when we are in right relationship with each other, with creation and with God.

A REFLECTION TO BEGIN

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In his autobiography, St. Ignatius of Loyola said that he received the greatest consolation

"from gazing at the sky and stars," which he did "often and for quite a long time."

Anyone with eyes can see the stars for themselves and feel immersed in their greatness. When we look at them often we begin to recognise their patterns, like old friends. By learning the traditional names of stars and constellations we are connected to our human heritage: Babylonian and Greek and Islamic, Indian and Chinese, African and Indigenous. Thus we honour and learn from our ancestors, who gazed at the same stars we do.

The eyes of science add depth to that immersion. Now we can place them in time and space, beyond the image of an overhead dome of bright dots to the reality of other suns shining on us from immense distances. Our telescopes reveal new beauties: galaxies and nebulae, moons and rings, always there but hidden from our sight until we used our God-given ingenuity to discern them. Indeed, we can appreciate these things even when we cannot see them personally ourselves.

And this is how we experience God. Moving out into the dark we notice a presence. With experience we learn to recognize that presence, again and again. From those gone before us we discover how God's presence has shaped our history. And with study we discern ever more deeply just how immense God is: a love older than the oldest star, wider than the furthest galaxy.

No wonder Ignatius found God in his night time gaze.

SOME KEY MESSAGES FROM LAUDATO SI'

Adapted from James Martin SJ, America 2015.

Everything is connected.

One of the greatest contributions of *Laudato Si* is that it offers what theologians call a "systematic" approach to an issue. First, Pope Francis links all of us to creation: *We are part of nature, included in it, and thus in constant interaction with it* n 139. But our decisions, particularly about production and consumption, have an inevitable effect on the environment. Pope Francis links a *magical conception of the market*, which privileges profit over the impact on the poor, with the abuse of the environment n 190.

Needless to say, a heedless pursuit of money that sets aside the interests of the marginalised and leads to the ruination of the planet are connected. Early on, he points to St. Francis of Assisi, who shows how *inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society and interior peace* n 10. Far from offering a naïve condemnation of capitalism, Pope Francis provides an intelligent critique of the limits of the market, especially where it fails to provide for the poor. *Profit, he says, cannot be the sole criterion of our decisions* n 187.

Widespread indifference and selfishness worsen environmental problems.

Pope Francis reserves his strongest criticism for the wealthy who ignore the problem of climate change, and especially its effect on the poor. *Many of those who possess more resources seem mostly to be concerned with masking the problems or concealing their symptoms...* n 26. Why, he asks, are so many of the wealthy turning away from the poor? Not only because *some view themselves as more worthy than others*, but because frequently decisions makers are *far removed from the poor*, physically, with no real contact to their brothers and sisters n 90, 49.

Selfishness also leads to the evaporation of the notion of the common good. This affects not simply those in the developing world, but also in the inner cities of our more developed countries, where he calls for what might be termed an *urban ecology*. In the world of *Laudato Si* there is no room for selfishness or indifference. One cannot care for the rest of nature *if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings* n 91.

The spiritual perspective is now part of the discussion on the environment

The greatest contribution of *Laudato Si* to the environmental dialogue is its systematic overview of the crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the environmental dialogue has been framed mainly with political, scientific and economic language. With this encyclical, the language of faith enters the discussion—clearly, decisively and systematically.

This does not mean that Pope Francis is imposing his beliefs on those concerned about the environment. *I am well aware, he says, that not all are believers* n 62. Nonetheless, the encyclical firmly grounds the discussion in a spiritual perspective and invites others to listen to a religious point of view, particularly its understanding of creation as a holy and precious gift from God to be revered by all men and women. But the pope also hopes to offer *ample motivation* to Christians and other believers to *care for nature* n 64.

This does also not mean that other popes (and other parts of the church) have not spoken about the crisis—Francis highlights the teachings of his predecessors, particularly St. John Paul II and Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. But in its systematic spiritual approach, this is a ground-breaking document that expands the conversation by inviting believers into the dialogue and providing fresh insights for those already involved.

A change of heart is needed

At heart, this document, addressed to *every person on the planet* is a call for a new way of looking at things, *a bold cultural revolution* n 3, 114. The document is hopeful, reminding us that because God is with us, we can strive both individually and corporately to change course. We can awaken our hearts and move towards an *ecological conversion* in which we see the intimate connection between God and all beings, and more readily listen to *the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor* n 49.