

**Reflection Paper: December 2016**

*“On the Care of our Common Home”*

**Preparation for the AIC Assembly of Delegates (March 2017)**

**400 years with Saint Vincent  
towards the future in our Common Home**



**Some reflections of Pope Francis based on his encyclical letter,**

**LAUDATO SI (Part Two)**

N.B. This paper invites us to engage in a process of internalization.

We propose using the method of Lectio Divina:

1. Read this presentation.
2. Meditate (what is this reflection saying to me; repeat the phrase that you find most significant).
3. Prayer (what is this reflection inviting me to say to God; what have I heard God saying to me: to thank God, to ask some favor from God, to praise God).
4. Commitment (following the example of Vincent de Paul, what specific commitment will I make).

❖ Prayer: 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.

Pope Francis

❖ Reflections of Pope Francis that are based on his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*

In the fourth chapter, entitled *Integral Ecology*, the Pope reflects on environmental, economic and social ecology. In this regard the Pope writes: “When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it”. The Pope tells us that we are a part of nature and are, therefore, included in nature. He goes on to state: “It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature” (#139).

In the same chapter the Pope writes about cultural ecology, the ecology of daily life, the principle of the common good and justice between generations.

With regard to the principle of the common good we read in #157: “Underlying the principle of the common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights ordered to his or her integral development. It has also to do with the overall welfare of society and the development of a variety of intermediate groups, applying the principle of subsidiarity. Outstanding among those groups is the family, as the basic cell of society. Finally, the common good calls for social peace, the stability and security provided by a certain order which cannot be achieved without particular concern for distributive justice; whenever this is violated, violence always ensues. Society as a whole, and the state in particular, are obliged to defend and promote the common good”.

When speaking about justice between the generations the Pope poses some difficult questions: “What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” He then concludes with the following words: “We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn” (#160).

In the fifth chapter, entitled, *Lines of Approach and Action*, the Pope proposes dialogue on the environment in the international community; dialogue for new national and local policies; dialogue and transparency in decision-making; politics and economy in dialogue for human fulfillment and religions in dialogue with science.

With regard to the last point, religions in dialogue with science, the Pope recommends: “Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God’s grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures, yet by constantly returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today’s needs” (#200).

In the sixth and final chapter entitled, Ecological education and spirituality, the Holy Father invites us to move towards a new lifestyle, to engage in a process of education with regard to the covenant between humanity and the environment and to also engage in a process of ecological conversion. The Pope also speaks about joy and peace, civic and political love, sacramental signs and the celebration of rest, the Trinity and the relationship between cultures, the Queen of all creation and beyond the sun.

Let us pause and reflect briefly on two of those themes: [1] Civic and political love – “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it. We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good” (#229); [2] This encyclical would not be complete without some mention of the Blessed Mother: “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” (#241).

Pope Francis states that the destruction of nature is a sin that has serious consequences because God always forgives and human beings forgive sometimes, but the earth never forgives. The Pope underlines the fact that not everything is lost because human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good and making a new start.

❖ Commitment:

It is important to give special attention to this aspect of Lectio Divina and make a concrete commitment with regard to CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME!

Guide for making commitments:

How can we respond to the challenges that the Pope places before us with regard to the following:

- Integral ecology: finding solutions so that the excluded members of society have their dignity restored to them at the same time as we care for nature.
- Ecological education: becoming aware of the reality that we need one another, that we are responsible for one another and responsible for the present and the future situation of our world.
- Proposing changes to current policy (promoting dialogue for new national and local policies).

Translated by Charles T. Plock, CM