

Two years ago in May 2015, the Pope released an Encyclical called *Laudato Si'* or Care for our Common Home and I am using a reflection by Fr James Martin to give us some 'take aways' from it. The spiritual perspective has entered into the discussion on the environment with this encyclical.

Pope Francis is not trying to impose beliefs on those concerned about the environment. He says: "I am well aware that not everyone are believers", however he firmly grounds the discussion in a spiritual perspective that invites everyone to listen to the 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 he asks believers to particularly be attentive to care for nature and to enter into this important debate and issue for our time.

He recognises that the poor are disproportionately affected by environmental change. He states that it is not simply the result of the power of the rich to make decisions without taking into account the impact on the poor, but the reality that the poor themselves have fewer resources of any kind to enable them to adapt to climate change. Additionally the natural resources of poorer countries, are used to fuel the development of the richer countries at great cost to their own situation. He calls in all decisions regarding the environment and the use of the earth's common resources, for an appreciation of the immense dignity of the poor. He's asking Christians and in fact all of humanity to recognise that less is more.

Pope Francis critiques an unthinking reliance on market forces in which every technological scientific or industrial advancement, is simply embraced, before considering how it will impact the environment and without any concern for its potential negative impact on human beings. But neither is he against technology, in fact he praises it, and asks us to be creative about the way we use it, so that it can in fact assist in our understanding and our efforts to work through this issue of environmental care. He suggests that it may be time to accept decreased growth in some part of the world in order to provide resources for other places to experience healthy growth. In contrast with the consumerist mind set, Christian spirituality offers a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with less. It's a matter of nothing less than a re-definition of our notion of progress.

So Catholic social teaching now firmly includes teaching on the environment. This encyclical, which holds the second third highest rank in terms of authority in the church, is firmly in line with the encyclicals on the modern day problems which began in 1891 and have come right through to today. The Church's social teaching and now including environmental teaching, have been called an absolute hidden treasure, which we need to all discover and dive into.

Pope Francis has given us a way to reflect from a faith perspective, but reaching out and embracing people of all faiths and none. He wisely begins the encyclical, not with a Catholic reflection of scripture and tradition, which might tempt non-believers to just

switch off, but with an overview of the crisis, including issues of water biodiversity and so on. Then in Chapter 2, he does turn towards the chapter of creation, in which he leads readers step-by-step through the call to care for creation, that extends back as far as the book of Genesis, when humankind was called to till and keep the earth. But to summarise his approach, he suggests we have done too much tilling and not enough keeping.

Pope Francis traces the theme of love for creation through both the old and the new testaments. He reminds us that God in Jesus Christ became not only human, but part of the natural world. In addition to helping non-believers understand the scripture and the Church's traditions, he explicitly tries to inspire believers to care for nature and the environment. He sees everything as connected, including the economy. 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." (Chapter 10) Far from offering a naïve condemnation of capitalism, Pope Francis provides us with 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 criterium of our decisions.

Laudato Si' draws upon both church teaching and contemporary findings from other fields, particularly science in this case, to help modern day people reflect on the deep questions of our day. Pope Francis has strong criticism for the wealthy, who ignore the problem of climate change and especially its impact on the poor. One cannot care for the rest of nature *"if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings."*(Par 91)

He calls for global dialogue and solidarity; he draws insights from Bishops' Conferences all over the world, including New Zealand. This is truly an attempt to have an ecumenical dialogue. He calls for new dialogue and honest debate, not simply within the Catholic church, but within the whole Christian community, right out into the wider faith community and in fact with all people, about our common home. He clearly states that there are no uniform recipes, what works in one region may not work in another, but we need to talk and we need to explore creatively. Essentially, this document calls for a change of heart, addressed to every person of the planet.

He says we face an enormous and urgent crisis, but essentially 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.

So I encourage you now to get practical and explore some simple things that you can do in your home, in your family, in your parish.

God bless.