



## **PASTORAL MESSAGE FROM BISHOP PHILIP ABOUT 'LAUDATO SI' AND THE CARE OF CREATION**

*The following is a Pastoral Message from Bishop Philip to the priests and people of the Diocese of Portsmouth following the recent publication of Pope Francis' encyclical letter Laudato Si and the first World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015.*

My dear Missionary Disciples,

Earlier this summer, Pope Francis published an encyclical letter *Laudato Si* on the care of the earth. Mother Earth "now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted upon her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God had endowed her" (1). Moreover, in a fresh initiative these last days, the Pope has instituted an annual World Day of Prayer, every 1<sup>st</sup> September, for the care of creation. In view of the publication of the encyclical and this first World Day of Prayer, I wish to say a few words about *Laudato Si* and to place our Diocese of Portsmouth on 'Environmental Alert.'

Citing the magisterium of St. John Paul II and Benedict XVI yet developing their thought, *Laudato Si* is arguably one of the most challenging papal encyclicals of recent times. It teaches with force that environmental concern is intrinsic to the Church's moral teaching. It develops an incisive critique of consumer-culture and the pursuit of affluence - "today's self-centred culture of instant gratification" (162) – and rejects unbridled technological solutions, a technology severed from ethics, as gravely damaging to creation and to the human person. The "human environment and the natural environment deteriorate together" (48). It also urges everyone to action, governments and individuals, before it is too late, for "our common home is falling into serious disrepair" (61). In a word, *Laudato Si* urges us to change our life-styles, to treat nature with respect, to adopt an integral ecology (as shown by St. Francis of Assisi) and to live more simply and without wastefulness.

*Laudato Si* is a long document. Yet it is easy to follow, and its central message, about recognising Mother Earth as our common home, is direct. It is a classic expression of Pope Francis' thought, style and preaching, with

frequent hyperbole and memorable turns of phrase. I encourage everyone in the Diocese to read it and to study it over the coming months, perhaps a few paragraphs a day. It would make an excellent document to discuss in a parish Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility group.

The encyclical has six chapters. In the Introduction and Chapter One (1-60), the Holy Father addresses the current ecological crisis and how the earth is "beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth" (21). Chapter Two (62-100) offers an ecological theology based on Scripture and the Church's Tradition and teaching. Chapter Three (101-136) addresses the causes of the ecological crisis: human sinfulness, a false "way of understanding human life and activity" (101). Chapter Four (137-162) maps out elements for a sound ecology that would integrate environmental, economic, social and cultural dimensions. Chapter Five (163-201) lauds the achievements of the ecological movement, yet calls for renewed dialogue within the international community to develop a global plan. Chapter Six (202-246) explores educational, life-style and spiritual issues.

Pope Francis concludes *Laudato Si* with reference to the Sacraments and the wonder of human bodiliness, to the interrelationship of creation as mirroring the Blessed Trinity, to the promise one day of a new heaven and a new earth, and to the powerful prayer and example of Mary, the Queen of all Creation.

There is much to reflect on in *Laudato Si* and more than a brief summary can do justice to. We should read it for ourselves. But how might we respond to it as a Diocese? The Diocese of Portsmouth, of course, is a complex and varied reality, comprising individual disciples and groups, the practising and not yet practising, families and single households, clergy and laity, men and women consecrated/religious and their communities, parishes and schools, as well as Framework and curial teams. Each of us will need to formulate a response. But as your Bishop, I would like to respond on all our behalf by placing our Diocese of Portsmouth on 'Environmental Alert.' This Environmental Alert will affect (1) the way we think, (2) the way we act, and (3) the way we pray.

First, the Environmental Alert means that everyone in the Diocese should acquire a renewed awareness of environmental and ecological issues as they impact upon Mother Earth and upon human society, at home locally and abroad. By studying *Laudato Si*, in what ways can we personally, economically and politically work towards the integral ecology the Holy Father proposes? Could we heighten awareness of this through an occasional column in parish or school newsletters, through mentions in local media, through the parish Justice, Peace and Social Responsibility group or the Pastoral Area Evangelisation Strategy Team, and through RE lessons in school? We might consider engaging in an ecumenical effort with other Christians or with secular campaigns to bring about real change. In this, we will find many resources available, not least from CAFOD ([www.cafod.org.uk](http://www.cafod.org.uk)) and from the US Bishops Conference ([www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org): enter *Laudato Si*).

Secondly, the Alert invites us to consider the thorny issue of a change of life-style to a more moderate and responsible level of consumption:

"A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes, shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment. ... avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. ... Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love" (211).

We need to become free from an obsession with consumption in order to live a more simple, prophetic, contemplative life-style in which 'less is more':

"A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment ... [Those] who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the look-out for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer" (222 - 223).

Everyone in the Diocese should consider how they might respond in practice to the Pope's call: individuals and groups, families and households, clergy and laity, consecrated persons and religious communities, parishes and schools, as well as Framework and curial teams.

And thirdly, the Environmental Alert should have an impact upon how we pray. Many Christians, not least those from the Orthodox Churches (cf. *Laudato Si* 7-9), share environmental concern; indeed, Pope Francis instituted the new World Day of Prayer at the suggestion of Patriarch Bartholomew. It would be good at Mass to incorporate an occasional intercession to ask God's grace to overcome the ecological crisis, and to make this an intention for a prayer group. We could offer the Rosary, especially the Third Joyful Mystery, the Incarnation, and the Fourth Glorious Mystery, the Assumption of Mary. Or read meditatively Chapters 1-3 of the Book of Genesis. In Eucharistic Adoration, it would be good to praise God for the gift of creation, whilst asking Him how I might become a better custodian of creation and the goods He has given me. And in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we should examine our life-styles, seeking His mercy for any sins we may have committed against an integral ecology. Again, the annual celebration of the World Day of Prayer in September could become for our parishes and schools a powerful moment of prayer, reflection, conversion and the adoption of new life styles.

Pope Francis concludes *Laudato Si* by turning to Mary, the Mother and Queen of all creation. So too at the end of this Pastoral Message, let us commend ourselves, and our Diocese of Portsmouth, to her powerful intercession. Here is part of the Holy Father's prayer, which I now invite you to pray:

"O 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.  
O Lord, seize us with Your power and light.  
Help us to protect all life,  
and to prepare for a better future,  
and for the coming of your Kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty.  
Praise be to you! Amen."

In Corde Iesu

+ Philip

Bishop of Portsmouth  
22<sup>nd</sup> August 2015, The Memorial of Mary, Queen of All Creation.