

## **Laudato Si' Homily notes**

**If a thing is worth doing well it is worth doing rather badly, as a Dominican friend used to say. Suppose we were to try something a little different this morning? Can you imagine Pope Francis' encyclical letter on care for our common home on the back of a postcard? Neither can I! But let's try at least to get ourselves a pocket version. Laudato Si' in twelve minutes flat. Are these the most confrontational things a pope has said in modern times? Will the world hear what he has to say? Will Cardinal Pell? Let's look together then.**

**The letter takes as read facts all rational people accept: that through the burning of fossil fuels human action is causing the Earth to warm dangerously; that this warming has already inflicted great harm and is certain to inflict catastrophe in the future, especially on poorer peoples and on future generations; that it will poison the oceans, transform lands into deserts, and lead to a tragic thinning-out of the wonderful diversity of living things. If the effects of global warming are to be countered or halted, there's no alternative to ending reliance on fossil fuels and embracing renewable sources of energy. Because of its failure to act, our industrial age may be remembered as the most irresponsible in human history.**

**Here is only what climate scientists and the secular prophets of doom, Al Gore and the Greens, have said already. Pope Francis looks further and deeper though. For him the climate crisis is only the most extreme expression of a destructive tendency that has accompanied industrialism: we ceased to regard the Earth, our common home, with awe and wonder and came to behave as masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits to our immediate needs. Never have we hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last 200 years. That's not to deny all the gifts and advances received too in science, medicine, communications: who can deny the beauty of an aircraft or a skyscraper? Nobody wants to return to the Stone Age! Pope Francis is no Luddite wanting to smash the machine.**

**But in the end, the treatment of the Earth as a resource to be exploited and mastered has led to pollution of the environment, chaotic congested mega-cities and our own throwaway culture. It has had dire consequences for our human predicament. If the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proves anything, it is the potential of technology to be subverted to anti-human purposes, as it was with the Nazis the means of genocide, as it is with the weapons that have no other use than mass destruction. Technology has become disconnected from human responsibility, values and conscience. Everything connects, Pope Francis says again and again. 'How could a society that practices abortion on an industrial scale respect the plight**

of the poor? Even a lifestyle partially resisting the regime of technology is now mockingly described as “counter-cultural”. The alliance of convenience that has been forged between technology and economic theory serves the interests of the wealthy, to the growing disadvantage of the poor.

The neo-liberal belief in the ‘magic of the market’ ought to have been finally discredited by the global financial crisis. The encyclical says it’s a theory that ‘today scarcely anyone dares to defend’. Yet financiers and technologists are united in the lie ‘that there is an infinite supply of the Earth’s goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry and beyond every limit.’ Talk of sustainable development is usually a way of distracting attention and offering excuses.

‘If technology has captured the economy, in turn the economy has captured politics’. The Pope describes life in a standard Western democracy: ‘a politics concerned with immediate results, consumer-driven, aiming at short-term growth. Under the pressure of the electorate, governments resist upsetting the public with measures which could affect the level of consumption or create risks for foreign investment. The short-sightedness of power politics blocks off an agenda for the future.’

‘Everything is related’. There exist not two crises, one environmental and the other social, but one complex crisis which is both social and environmental: a sense of deep communion with the natural world we inhabit, can’t really grow and flourish if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings. The human family is disfigured by radical inequality. ‘This inequality should arouse our indignation. It rarely does.’ The wealthy are barely in touch with the conditions of life of the poor. If the poor enter into their calculations at all, it is often as an afterthought. Conscience has been numbed. What we see is the globalization of indifference.

One of the reasons for the environmental crisis is ‘the obscene level of consumption concentrated in the wealthy nations, and amongst the wealthy classes in both the developed and the undeveloped worlds.’ Some of the wealthy haven’t the slightest idea of what to do with all their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed advantages and leaving behind them waste that encumbers the Earth. This competitive consumerism characterised by greed and self-centredness buys only an illusory happiness: in the consumer society loneliness, depression and anxiety are growing and the good things that have no price ticket, art and poetry, interior life and spirituality, find no place in human lives or become confined to the niche interests of the few. ‘Is it realistic to hope that people obsessed with

**maximising profits will stop to reflect on the environmental damage they leave behind for future generations?’**

**Here then is what we see in the mirror Pope Francis holds up to our age. Is he trespassing on the grounds of science and economics, should he leave politics to others? Or is this radical critique of Western civilisation timely and just? Caritas and Cafod our representatives in the developing world tell us that only a conversion of attitudes is any use. But is there any real hope of change? Yes, says the Pope, but yes. The green movement has made significant advances. Young people are aware of what is happening to our common home and of the terrible betrayal by their parents’ generation. ‘They possess a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit’. We are endowed with both free will and inventiveness, which means that human history reveals both ‘decadence and mutual destruction’ but also ‘freedom, growth, salvation and love.’ Appealing to the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Councils and his predecessors the popes, drawing from the writings of the bishops’ conferences and citing the example of the saints from Francis of Assisi to Charles de Foucauld, Francis calls to witness our long tradition of generosity, justice and care for the order of Creation, he speaks from the ancient wisdom that is our patrimony though we may have half forgotten it.**

**‘Human beings can transcend their mental and social conditioning.’ They are ‘born for love’. ‘No system can completely suppress our openness to what is true, good and beautiful.’ ‘All is not lost.’ This thought weaves its way throughout the encyclical, lightening the darkness. On occasion it is expressed quite wonderfully. ‘An authentic humanity seems to dwell in the midst of the technological culture, almost unnoticed, like a mist seeping gently beneath a closed door’. Pope Francis reminds us of the divine calling of Adam and Eve, to till the earth and care for it, the vocation that has never been lost. He remembers that other story of the innocent and just man, Noah, who lived at a time when ‘the wickedness of mortals was great in the earth’. Through him, however, God ‘gave humanity the chance of a new beginning. All it takes is one good person to restore hope!’ The Pope calls on us to give a sign: to cultivate sobriety and humility in our personal lives. Everyone can make that leap of confidence and faith that says yes to human dignity, no to selfishness, even by the smallest act. Praise God with the creation! Say grace before meals! Laudato Si’!**