

Laudato Si *Pope Francis's Encyclical on the Environment (6)*

We have now come to the sixth and final chapter of Pope Francis's encyclical on the environment: *Laudato Si*. Thus far I have discussed how the Pope analyzes the crisis that we face and how he proposes we address it. The last chapter of *Laudato Si* relates what the Pope has said to education and spirituality. Entitled "Ecological Education and Spirituality," it consists of nine sections.

The first section, *Toward a New Lifestyle*, begins with the premises that if we are to reverse the ecological damage that has occurred then "Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change." The Pope notes how many people get caught up "in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending." He calls it "compulsive consumerism." But buying more and more never solves anything, since "the emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume." What is truly needed is a change of lifestyle that "could bring healthy pressure to bear on those who wield political, economic and social power." Purchasing, the Pope says, "is always a moral—and not simply economic—act."

In the second section, *Education for the Covenant between Humanity and the Environment*, the Pope calls for environmental education. Such education "can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us." Here he gives some practical examples such as 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.

In the third section, entitled *Ecological Conversion*, Francis provides some suggestions for an "ecological spirituality, grounded in the convictions of faith." Living as protectors of God's handiwork, he says, is essential to a life of virtue; "it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience."

Section four, *Joy and Peace*, calls for a "prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption." Pope Francis notes that our Christian spirituality "proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little." In a wonderful definition of happiness, he writes, "Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer."

Section Five, *Civic and Political Love*, develops the theme that "social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a culture of care which permeate all of society."

Section Six, *Sacramental Signs and the Celebration of Rest*, relate the sacraments and the Sabbath to care of the environment. In the sacraments the elements of the world such as water, bread, wine, and oil are taken up and sanctified to bring us into a relationship with God through Christ. In this section the Pope notes that "Sunday, like the Jewish Sabbath, is meant to be a day which heals our relationship with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world."

As I reflect on the chapter and the Pope's encyclical I am struck by the many ways that he relates our use and care of the environment to our spirituality and relationship with God. If we are out of sorts with our environment because we have exploited and used it for our own selfish goals, then it is difficult for us to be in a right relationship with God. But if we are in a right

relationship with God, then we will surely treat the world around us with the care and protection it deserves. *Father Matera*

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 to You!