

Our Common Home

SESSION 1: Praise and Lament

Quotations from *Laudato Si'*

God has written a precious book, “whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe . . . From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine . . . alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun and the fall of night. Paying attention to this manifestation, we learn to see ourselves in relation to all other creatures.[85]

*How confidently the desire
of God are spoken of!*

Perhaps God wants

Something quite different . . . (Denise Levertov)

*This **sister** now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will . . . This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters. [2]*

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. None is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God’s love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of their true selves. [84]

*We are not God. The earth was here before us and it has been given to us. This allows us to respond to the charge that Judeo-Christian thinking, on the basis of the Genesis account which grants man "dominion" over the earth (cf. Gen 1:28), has encouraged the unbridled exploitation of nature by painting him as domineering and destructive by nature. This is not a correct interpretation of the Bible as understood by the Church. Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. . . Each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it **needs** for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations. "The earth is the Lord's" (Ps 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (Dt 10:14). [67]*

Many things have to change course, but it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone. This basic awareness would enable the development of new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge stands before us, and it will demand that we set out on the long path of renewal. [202]

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]

The current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which in turn becomes "a seedbed for collective selfishness".[145] When people become self-centered and self-enclosed, their greed increases. The emptier a person's heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own and consume. . . So our concern cannot be limited merely to the threat of extreme weather events, but must also extend to the catastrophic consequences of social unrest. Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people are capable of maintaining it, can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. [204]

Yet all is not lost. Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start, despite their mental and social conditioning. We are able to take an honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom. No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. [205]

Closing Commissioning

Leader: *We were brought here together today to explore God's revelation through the natural world. Indeed we have felt God's presence with us, in the water, in the trees, in the many of God's creatures that accompanied us on our journey today. Today we have experienced the depths of God's love for all of God's creation, including you and me. We are called by name to see you in your creation and to play an integral role in the healing of the earth in a way that only will be revealed to us through prayer and reflection. Holy One, continue to be present to us in and through the natural world and guide us in our ongoing discernment of how we can contribute to the healing of the earth and the healing of those excluded, the poor, and the ones who bear the brunt of our environmental destruction.*

All: *All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may know and protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters with all of creation – human and non-human -- harming no one. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction. Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth. Teach us to discover the worth of each thing and to see you in your creation, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light. We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.*

Open group prayers/intercessions

Stand in a circle, turning to the person on the right and saying:

"[Name], you are talented, you are capable, you are essential to the Creator's plan for healing our broken world."

Closing