

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth! »

In the month of April 2016, for our fraternal meetings, we are proposing to look into the encyclical letter from Pope Francis «Laudato Si». This encyclical brings us a reflection on the safeguard of our common house.

Recall: At the monthly meeting, the fraternity should have in place at the disposal of the members a Bible, at least one copy of the General Constitutions, an example of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and at least one copy of Living with Christ. Also, each member should have in hand their own copy of the Rule.

Good preparation --- Good meeting

APRIL 2016 MONTHLY MEETING

Opening Prayer and Song: (According to the Ritual or chosen by the Fraternity)

Introduction

We suggest that you start with a personal reading of the text and then take a moment of reflection in preparation for the sharing that will occur during the meeting.

The introduction to the encyclical is an invitation to delve into the original text and to hear the call from Francis to discover how all the challenges of our humanity are inter-related; that a conversion in depth is needed: a new way of living with others and with the universe.

Reading: (chose a person who read calmly)

Our Sister Mother Earth ...

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. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. 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. *Gen 2:7*); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.

Reflection: The reflection is inspired by the following question:

Have you observed the damage caused to our Sister Mother Earth? Where? (About 15 minutes)
Afterwards continue the reading which will be followed by a fraternal sharing.

Saint Francis of Assisi

I do not want to write this Encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome. I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason". His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists.

His disciple Saint Bonaventure tells us that, "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother' or 'sister'". Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behaviour. If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of Saint Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

What is more, Saint Francis, faithful to Scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. "Through the greatness and the beauty of creatures one comes to know by analogy their maker" (*Wisdom* 13:5); indeed, "his eternal power and divinity have been made known through his works since the creation of the world" (*Rom* 1:20). For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and

those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the Creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise.

Sharing:

Having read the preceding paragraphs, share your answers on the following questions: Saint Francis of Assisi has been called the patron saint of the environment.

1. What prompted this designation?
2. Why is he so popular? (About 20 minutes)

Biblical Research:

Note: If you prefer sharing on the Gospel of the day, or on Sunday's Gospel, take the time necessary to read and internalize it, then if you wish, share your reflections using one or two of the following questions:

1. What does this gospel teach us?
2. To whom does it speak?
3. How does it reach us personally?
4. Is it a message of hope? Other kind of message? Why and how is it?

In the Footsteps of Francis

(Excerpt from the first article of the encyclical letter Laudato Si)

“Laudato si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. “Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”.

Deepening of points taken from the Rule and the General Constitutions

Rule Article 18

Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which " bear the imprint of the Most High ", and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

General Constitutions Article 18.4

Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively put forward initiative that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person.

Life – Objective:

In the month of April, in this time of renewal, let us make our monthly fraternal meeting more ecological by being more conscientiously aware of our environment ...

Events and Information from the Church and the Order

Remind the members of regional and local activities.

End of the meeting: It is suggested to pray or sing the Cantic of Brother Sun
Most High, all-powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no man is worthy to mention Your name. Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor, and bears a likeness of You, Most High One. Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the by stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind, and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather through which You give sustenance to Your creatures. Praised be You, my Lord through Sister Water, which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste. Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You light the night, and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong. Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces varied fruits with coloured flower and herbs. Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death from whom no living man can escape. Woe Onto those who die in mortal sin. Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will, for the second death shall do them no harm. Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

At home

Pope Francis concludes his introduction with this appeal. Read it and then, answer the following question: **What is my answer?**

His appeal

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world's poorest. Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.