



THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET BEGINS HERE: START PLANTING TREES

Has the earth reached the twilight of its existence? No! At least, not if we tend it as if it were truly our own. Not if we respect it as our “partner,” as a gift that has been given to us. Not if we save it from the terrible destiny it has been heading toward over the years due to the exploitation, pollution and internal manipulation that are threatening its beauty and fecundity. Ideologies must be prevented from stripping the earth any further of its inborn dignity. Everything is interconnected. The current ecological crisis—which in essence reflects the worldwide ethical-cultural crisis—is questioning us deeply about this all-important issue and its global ramifications. The subject has always been vital but in these days it has attracted greater attention and concern thanks to the encyclical of Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On the Care for Our Common Home*.

The document, which knocks on the door of every conscience, centers on the theme that even though we might not be aware of or might ignore it, the fact is that we, as living creatures, are connected to everything

around us. “Everything is related,” the Pope says in n. 92 of the encyclical, “and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.”

I strongly recommend that everyone read this stupendous document—a heartfelt appeal for conversion regarding the environment. The text is written in language understandable to everyone because its subject concerns everyone; it is a call to adhere to a “sublime fraternity with all creation” (n. 221), because if nature weeps, the human being also weeps, and vice-versa. As Pope Francis says: “God always forgives; human beings sometimes forgive; but nature never forgives!”

Everything in the universe is connected by a fine thread, which some call *creative love*, others *cosmic energy*, and still others *polyphonic existence* or *unfathomable mystery*.

The theme of safeguarding the environment is all-important because if one part of it suffers, then all the rest of creation feels the effects. Let us never think that we are de-



tached from creation, that we live apart from it, that we have nothing in common with it, because “the natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others” (n. 95).

Individualism accustoms us to believing the opposite in the name of personal autonomy and efficiency, which are proving to be lethal and a complete failure. The golden thread running through the encyclical is that, like it or not, we are all connected to one another in ways that are at times unexplainable but nevertheless very real. The world is sick because the human heart has become proud. How many times the Pope has said that we cannot save ourselves alone, by building walls, adopting selfish lifestyles, insisting on separations and divisions. He analyzes the situation very clearly, saying: “The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us” (n. 159).

Only when we return to a vision of God as the Father of everything he has entrusted to

us will the earth be able to breathe again, making it possible for us to inhale fresh air, drink water in abundance, and immerse ourselves in her magnificence without the risk of being contaminated or poisoned. But all this inevitably implies a solid “relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature” (n. 67). If we attain this goal, then we will rejoice in contemplating Mother Earth, tilling her, loving her and being a part of her, feeling her to be our home on our journey through life. In short, we will behave with the dignity of creatures who transform the earth into a hymn of praise to her silent Author. Faith renews our awareness that nature is a proclamation of happiness because “we are not God; the earth was here before us and it has been given to us” (Ibid.)

The word *before* encapsulates the secret for establishing a human and cultural environment in daily life, in which politics and economics aim at the common good. It gives rise to the *three golden rules* of the encyclical, namely: “creation can only be understood as a gift illuminated by the love that calls us together into universal communion” (n. 76); “let us continue to wonder about the purpose and meaning of everything” (n. 113); “we need to experience a conversion—a change of heart” (n. 218).

So let us plant the tree of justice and truth in the hearts of human beings because nature offers sustenance to all the peoples of the earth by means of her laws and her splendor, which spring from the smile of the Creator, who always “destroys the powers of evil with the omnipotence of his love” (Benedict XVI).

*His Excellency Giancarlo Maria Bregantini
Archbishop of Campobasso-Boiano, Italy*

