



diocese
of **limerick**
our catholic community

LISTENING TO NATURE'S WORDS OF LOVE
CARING FOR OUR COMMON HOME

Pastoral Letter, Lent 2020



Introduction

Lent is a special time. It offers us forty days to take stock, take some steps, and take hold of our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. It's a time of conversion. This year I propose we focus on what has been called "ecological conversion".

When in 1968 the astronaut William Anders took a photograph of the earth with some of the Moon's surface also showing in the photo, little could he have imagined the impact it would have. As he himself put it on the fiftieth anniversary of that event, "We set out to explore the moon and instead discovered the Earth". The US Post Office issued a stamp with that Earthrise photo over the words 'In the beginning, God...'. The awesome and stunning photo of our planet led many in a reverent silence to whisper the word "God". God who is Love created the world.

Our planet is indeed beautiful and awesome it is also so vulnerable and so finite. Fifty years on from that photo the words of a Pope jolt us about how we have treated creation. In an interview-film entitled "Pope Francis - A Man of his Word" directed by the German film Director, Wim Wenders (I'd recommend the film as good watching during Lent. It is on Netflix), Pope Francis doesn't mince his words: "If you ask me who is the poorest of the poorest of the poor, I would say Mother Earth. We have plundered her. We have abused her." He goes on to remind us we are called to be caretakers of the earth.

It is his concern for the care of the earth that made him write what has become his most widely read encyclical: *Laudato Si'*. Taking up a phrase from St. Francis "May you be praised" (in poetic Italian that is: "Laudato Si'), Pope Francis dedicates his encyclical to the theme of the environment. Many were astonished at the strength of that encyclical. In it he calls all of us to ecological conversion. He encourages us, as he did at the United Nations, to counter a growing "culture of waste."

In the past year, Greta Thunberg has captured imaginations and minds. Not just her. Many young people have expressed their concern over what is happening our planet. They are really concerned about the world they are inheriting from previous generations. In schools across the Diocese children are enthusiastic about the Green Flag awards. Young adults are searching for new ways to save our planet. It is important for those of us who are older to recognise that young people have the antennae of the future. Their voice is prophetic indicating God's will for us.

Recently in his Apostolic Exhortation about the Amazon region, *Beloved Amazonia*, n. 53, Pope Francis calls us all to be alert to the real challenge that the care of our planet is posing to our present lifestyles:

Frequently we let our consciences be deadened, since distractions constantly dull our realization of just how limited



and finite our world really is. From a superficial standpoint, we might well think that things do not look that serious, and the planet could continue as it is for some time. Such evasiveness serves as a license to carrying on with our present lifestyles and models of production and consumption. This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen.

I am grateful for all that is going on in our Diocese around the theme of care of our common home. I think of the initiatives promoted by the Salesian Sisters through their Cosmology Group. The Salesian Sisters who this year celebrate the centenary of their arrival in Limerick together with Trócaire have worked together to deliver a 'Season of Creation' workshop to support parishes by sharing stories of Trócaire's experiences at a global level, and offering practical resources and ideas for liturgies and actions at a local level in parishes during the Season of Creation that is celebrated in the Diocese in the month of September.

The Limerick Diocese Trócaire volunteer group has also been busy raising awareness of the devastating effects of climate change in the most vulnerable communities in the developing world. The Limerick parish volunteers have been speaking at masses, visiting schools and were very successful in raising much needed funds through the sale of 'Gifts of love' cards during Advent (€4,867 was raised in Limerick).

I was delighted to see Limerick primary and post primary schools participating in Trócaire's "Game changers" workshops hosted recently in the Diocesan Centre at St Munchin's. Young people gained insight and understanding of the climate justice and social justice challenges faced by people in the developing world through the medium of computer and board games. Some very creative ideas for new educational games were generated by our Limerick students some of whom will be entered this year in the Trócaire 'Game Changers' national competition. We had three schools reach the finals last year for the first year of the competition.

Lent is a time for Ecological Conversion

We might ask what has all of this to do with Lent? On Ash Wednesday, in imposing ashes on our forehead, the priest or lay person invites us to, "Turn away from sin and be faithful to the Gospel". To be faithful to the Gospel also involves our attitude to the care of our planet, our "common home" as Pope Francis calls it. There is such a thing as ecological conversion and Lent is a good time to focus on it.



We need conversion because environmental issues also involve sin. Yes, we can name many scientific facts to do with the serious environmental crisis but we need also to acknowledge the place sin plays in bringing us to this point. What we learn from the creation accounts in the first pages of the Book of Genesis containing the stories of Adam and Eve and the original Fall, is that through sin our relationships with God, with our neighbours and with creation were broken. And so the harmony that existed between God the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted. Humanity (represented in Adam and Eve) tried to take the place of God without acknowledging that we are limited in our humanity needing to depend on and work with God. As a result, creation itself got abused.

Greed took over. It still takes hold of us. And greed can bring us to the point where, as Pope Francis puts it, we see every desire we feel as a right and gradually that destroys us: 'the mentality expressed in the slogans *"I want it all and I want it now!"* and *"Too much is never enough"*, gains the upper hand'.

During Lent, we get a chance, through fasting, prayer and almsgiving, to look more closely at our relationships with God, with others and with creation. We recognise that because of Jesus Christ we can grow in our great dignity as human beings created in God's image and likeness.





This year we can focus on how the Christian message provides us with many reasons as to why we need to convert in our attitude to the planet. Pope Francis lists the reasons:

These include the awareness that each creature reflects something of God and has a message to convey to us, and the security that Christ has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being, surrounding it with his affection and penetrating it with his light. Then too, there is the recognition that God created the world, writing into it an order and a dynamism that human beings have no right to ignore. We read in the Gospel that Jesus says of the birds of the air that “not one of them is forgotten before God” (Lk 12:6). How then can we possibly mistreat them or cause them harm? (n. 221).

Francis of Assisi’s Integral Ecology

When it comes to care of our planet, Pope Francis often directs our attention to Saint Francis of Assisi as a great model. Perhaps this Lent we might read something about St. Francis. He is well known for his care of the poor and vulnerable. But he lived joyfully what Pope Francis calls “integral ecology”, that is, an ecology that takes into account the many inter-related dimensions of care of our planet – from respect for all human life to care of the poor, from contemplation of the beauty of creation to working for justice.

St. Francis of Assisi approached the world around him with an attitude of wonder and gratitude. The world isn’t something to be used or mastered or made into an object for manipulation at will. He called all creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister’. For him, nature is a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. We hear this in the famous hymn he composed.

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 splendour;
and bears a likeness of you, Most High.
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the 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 whom you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,
who 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

In this hymn in which Saint Francis praises God for his creatures, he goes on to say: “Praised be you my Lord, through those who give pardon for your love”. Pope Francis comments that for Francis of Assisi, everything is connected: “Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”

St. 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.

Our Irish Tradition

We are blessed in Ireland that the Franciscan spirit was spread by the Franciscan family over many centuries. And we are also grateful for our many early Christian ancestors who drew our attention to how God’s traces are to be found in creation. We think of St. Kevin of Glendalough and his love of nature and animals. A legend has it that a blackbird laid an egg in Kevin’s hand when his arms were outstretched in prayer. Respectful of nature, St. Kevin remained in this position until the baby bird hatched. Seamus Heaney wrote a poem about this event.

We think too of St. Ita, one of the patron saints of Limerick Diocese. The story goes that when she decided to settle in Killeedy, a chieftain offered her a large grant of land. But Ita would accept only four acres, which she cultivated intensively. She wanted what she needed for the support of the convent and no more.

A former president of Ireland, Douglas Hyde, wrote that the Irish people “see the hand of God in every place, in every time and in everything. They have this sense of life being embraced on all sides by God.” We see this, for instance, in St. Patrick’s Breastplate (also known as the Deer’s Cry) that says,



I arise today, through
The strength of heaven,
The light of the sun,
The radiance of the moon,
The splendour of fire,
The speed of lightning,
The swiftness of wind,
The depth of the sea,
The stability of the earth,
The firmness of rock.

I arise today
Through God's strength to pilot me...

In more recent centuries, poets have expressed their wonder at God's presence beneath all of creation. Think, for instance, of the well-known poem "the World Is charged with the grandeur of God" by Gerard Manley Hopkins. He lived in Ireland for five years and a Mercy Sister living in Limerick, Sr. Jo O'Donovan, has produced a lovely work entitled: *Bright Wings, Dappled Things: Poems by Gerard Manley Hopkins*. We can think too of the poetry of Patrick Kavanagh. In his poem, "The One", he writes, "A humble scene in a backward place, Where no one important ever looked..., ... beautiful, beautiful, beautiful God, Was breathing his love by a cutaway bog."¹

Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*

This Lent we can let ourselves be guided by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*. It is well worth reading in its entirety. I propose now simply to choose a few quotes from Pope Francis and offer them for meditation to help us this Lent.

Facing the Issues: Our Common Home in Serious Disrepair

First, Pope Francis helps to name the reality and face the issues and causes of the ecological crisis. He summarises when he says that "We need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair." The signs that things are now reaching a breaking point are large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises.

Pope Francis gets to the core of the environmental crisis when he says that having lost sight of what it is to be human, the purpose and goal of life and of our world, the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view. We have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity. The Pope concludes: "If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations". (n. 61).

¹ For a fine book to read on Patrick Kavanagh's works, see Sr. Una Agnew's book, *The Mystical Imagination of Patrick Kavanagh, A Buttonhole in Heaven* (Dublin: Veritas, 2019).

Pope Francis underlines a few concerns.

He draws our attention to technology. On the one hand, we have to be grateful for the great developments technology has brought us. The Pope acknowledges that technology has provided useful domestic appliances and given us great transportation systems. It has remedied countless evils which used to harm and limit human beings. And yet the power technology has given – nuclear energy, biotechnology, knowledge of our DNA etc – is also a development that calls for right decisions on our part. The fact is, however, as Pope Francis affirms, that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well”. Our immense technological development “has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience” (n. 105). Just because we *can* do things does not mean it’s always right to do them. We are weak in a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching self-restraint.

Another issue is consumerism. Pope Francis comments that “since the market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products, people can easily get caught up in a whirlwind of needless buying and spending. Compulsive consumerism is one example of how the techno-economic paradigm affects individuals” (n. 202). Greed and self-centredness can easily take hold of society especially in times of fear and uncertainty. Again Pope Francis: “when people become self-centred 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. It becomes almost impossible to accept the limits imposed by reality.” (n. 204). When this is pushed to extremes it can always lead to social unrest because some people become obsessed with a consumerist lifestyle (with a minority having huge means to maintain that lifestyle) and the common good is forgotten.

Nevertheless, Pope Francis holds out hope. “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. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us.” (n. 204).

What the Bible Says about Creation

Christians have not always respected creation. One of the reasons for that is the way they interpreted God’s words narrated in the creation account in the Book of Genesis: “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion...”. Pope Francis offers an important clarification. In saying to man that he is to have “dominion” over the earth, God certainly did not mean exploit and plunder the earth. Unfortunately, some Christians took the words about



“dominion” to mean God wants us to take control of the earth in a domineering way that ends up with a destructive exploitation of nature. The real meaning of the text, however, is that we are to “till and keep” the garden of the world.

Rather than dominate or exploit we are to cultivate, protect and preserve. Creation is a gift from God the Father. It is love that explains our world and how we are to live in communion with one another and so with creation. The call to love creation and love one another is written into who we are so much so that the Pope states: “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (n. 89).

Quoting the Catechism, Pope Francis says something beautiful about each creature:

As the Catechism teaches: “God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other” (n. 86.)

Everything is Interconnected: Towards a New Lifestyle

A notion the Pope repeats again and again in his encyclical on the environment is that everything is interconnected. For him, the ecological question is linked to economics, justice, and respect for our human life and dignity. Our small everyday decisions and the big policy decisions as well as our economic and justice systems are all linked with our care for the planet, our common home, and care for human life at all stages.

In the last chapter of his encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis reminds us that while “many things have to change course...it is we human beings above all who need to change”. We need to rediscover our common origin, how we belong to one another and that we have a future that is to be shared with everyone. We need to develop new convictions, attitudes and forms of life. That calls all of us to work together at this, in family life, in schools, in cultural and social aspects of life and, of course, in the Church.

It's not enough to know information about the environment or make laws about it. We need to create what Pope Francis calls an “ecological citizenship” by cultivating good habits. Let's listen to what Pope Francis says about this:

A person who could afford to spend and consume more but regularly uses less heating and wears warmer clothes, shows the kind of convictions and attitudes which help to protect the environment. There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and

significantly affect the world around us, 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, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity. (n. 211).

Pope Francis knows that some might say these efforts are not going to change the world. They seem insignificant. But he believes all our small deeds benefit society, perhaps often in ways unknown to us because they create ripples of goodness that inevitably tend to spread. He also suggests that such actions can restore our sense of self-esteem; they can enable us to live more fully and to feel that life on earth is worthwhile.

While we can acknowledge with gratitude the very important role schools and colleges play in promoting care for our common home, Pope Francis also stresses the importance of the family in forming us in the right attitudes that can protect creation. The family is the place where, in a world often characterised by a culture of death, we learn the culture of life. Let's listen again to Pope Francis:

In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say "thank you" as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings. N. 213.

He notes a paradox. While the "green" agenda is spoken of a lot, there is often a numbing of conscience that somehow doesn't see how all the issues of the environment are inter-related. The environmental issues have resulted in global inequality with the poorest of the world suffering the most. It is known that approximately one third of all food produced in the world is discarded. This food thrown out is as if it were stolen from the table of the poor. It is this awareness that has made Trócaire, the Catholic Church's relief agency, work increasingly to raise awareness of how issues to do with poverty and world natural disasters are often related to environmental issues calling for a holistic approach to our care of the earth.



Lent

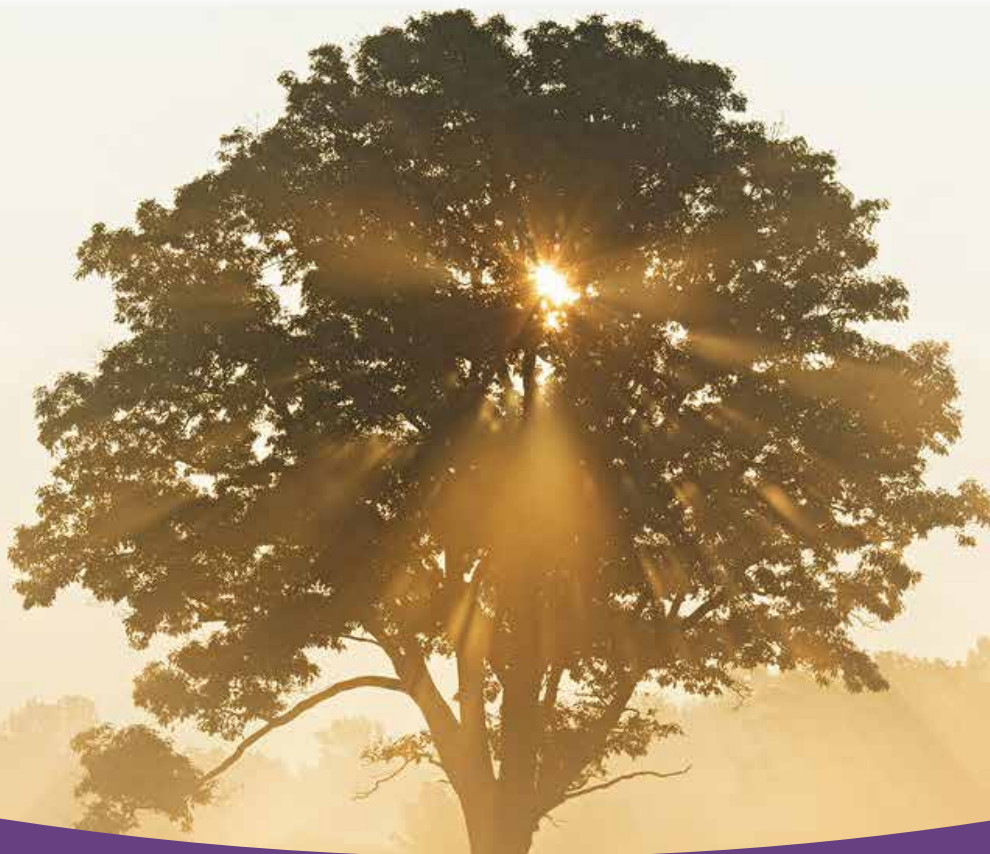
Ideas for Lent 2020

Lent is traditionally associated with three things – prayer, fasting and almsgiving. During Lent this year why not take each of these elements and see how we might practice them from the perspective of the points offered for our consideration by Pope Francis in his encyclical on care for our common home, *Laudato Si'*.

Prayer. One aspect we might introduce into our prayer this Lent is to take time to contemplate God's beauty in creation, especially God's image in each human being. As Pope Francis puts it, "if someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple. If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realize that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour." (n. 215).

Lent is an opportunity to look again at our world, but taking time to look at it with a spirit of wonder and gratitude for the world as God's loving gift. It's a time to recognise we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures but joined, as Pope Francis puts it, "in a splendid universal communion" (n. 220). We need to take time to look not as outsiders at the world but rather to look at the world "from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings". There is such a constant flood of new consumer goods coming at us that we can be baffled, always on the look-out for more, for what we do not have and so end up numbed to the gift of small things, the everyday opportunities life gives us.

In letting ourselves be attracted by a created reality such as a tree, a flower, an animal, the sky, the wind, we can remember Pope Francis's words: "the universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all things" (n. 233)



This Lent we can focus on developing a contemplative attitude to life. Nature is filled with words of love. We need to listen to them throughout the day. But for that we also need to make specific moments of time in our frenetic activities and hurry, to shut the blinds on our ever-wracking distractions so that we can time of peace and prayer.

The Eucharist is a special prayer and it too can be rediscovered in what it says to us about creation. Indeed, we should recall how Sunday as a day of rest is itself a help in the care of our planet. It is a day of celebration of the Resurrection, the first day of the new creation. It involves relaxation, celebration and being with relations and visiting the sick. What Sunday does is to open our eyes to the larger picture and renews our sensitivity to others. It sheds its light on the whole week, and motivates us to greater concern for nature and the poor.

At Mass as we offer the bread and wine, we are offering ourselves, our world and creation. Joined to Jesus Christ, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos is taken up in giving thanks to God. Pope Francis describes Mass as an act of cosmic love:

Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on “the altar of the world”. The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God’s hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, “creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself”. Thus, the Eucharist is also a source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation (n. 236).

There are many other forms of prayer. Perhaps you might like to pray the *Laudato Si'* rosary: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/eco-spirituality/>.

Pope Francis reminds us of the simple prayer practice that we might do more consciously – the daily giving thanks to God before and after meals: “that moment of blessing, however brief, reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need” (n. 227).

Fasting. When we think of fasting during Lent, we think about giving up something. We all appreciate there is a value in doing without something for a while. It makes us appreciate it better and, for instance, when we deprive ourselves of a little food, we feel a hunger that reminds us of the billion people of our world that go to bed every night hungry.

But fasting applies not just to food. It is about how we live moderation in general. Life is more than simply accumulating things and pleasures. We are called to live sobriety. Perhaps it’s not a word we often think of as applying to us, but sobriety is about our attitude to living life with simplicity and a sense of “less is more”. Pope Francis writes:



When lived freely and consciously, (sobriety) is liberating. It is not a lesser life or one lived with less intensity. On the contrary, it is a way of living life to the full. In reality, those who enjoy more and live better each moment are those who have given up dipping here and there, always on the lookout for what they do not have. They experience what it means to appreciate each person and each thing, learning familiarity with the simplest things and how to enjoy them. So they are able to shed unsatisfied needs, reducing their obsessiveness and weariness. Even living on little, they can live a lot, above all when they cultivate other pleasures and find satisfaction in fraternal encounters, in service, in developing their gifts, in music and art, in contact with nature, in prayer. Happiness means knowing how to limit some needs which only diminish us, and being open to the many different possibilities which life can offer.

The example of nature teaches us. Plants use only the amount of water and nutrients they need to grow and flower. Christian love inspires us to live a healthy sobriety that set us free.

Almsgiving. Almsgiving is the third way we can live Lent. It is the way of generosity by giving to and helping others. In Ireland we have the wonderful tradition of the Trócaire initiatives which I encourage. Trócaire has done great work in raising consciousness of the environmental issues. It is worth consulting its website.

For Pope Francis everything is connected. If we want to tackle environmental issues, we need to create a culture of giving at every level. He says that the phenomena of poverty in our world is very much linked with how we approach the care of our planet overall and how we treat others as our sisters and brothers. The fact is that God is our Father and we are all sisters and brothers, children of God. So Pope Francis speaks of a universal fraternity and says, “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it. We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good”. (n. 229).

Lent is a time to improve in our efforts to live and create around us a culture of giving. At times we might feel we don't have much to give. But Pope Francis points to Saint Therese of Lisieux who invited us to practise the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture that sows peace and friendship. It is true. There are many ways we can give: we can give our time, a listening ear, patience, advice, encouragement, appreciation, support. There is so much we can give.

Some will give in a more public political manner. And this is to be encouraged. Politics is a way of loving, by serving the many forms of love in civic society. Politicians can do much for the environment and we need to encourage and support them in their efforts.



Of course, as Pope Francis recognises, we can all do our part to build up our local community in initiatives that make a difference. Community actions can do a lot to improve our environment:

Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences. (n. 232)

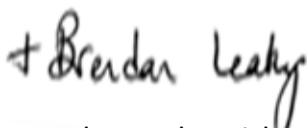
Perhaps there are local environmental initiatives that parish communities can begin working on together this Lent? There are many possibilities – from removing all single use plastics from your parish church, centre etc. to thinking about creating a Laudato Si' garden or wildflower space in the church grounds. On special occasions such as First Holy Communions, Confirmations, Weddings Baptisms, it might be an idea to plant a tree. The Society of African Missionaries have a website explaining the value of doing this: www.sma.ie/laudatotree. Book clubs are often popular today. Perhaps some might join together this Lent in reading the wonderful Encyclical letter, Laudato Si' from Pope Francis.

Conclusion

Lent is never meant to be simply an individual penitential exercise. Rather it is the season where together as a community we seek to let the Lord be more present within us and among us. In focussing on Lent in terms of an ecological conversion, we are taking steps that benefit not just us personally or our society today but we are also building up our community for the future. Pope Francis writes,

Once we start to think about the kind of world we are leaving to future generations, we look at things differently; we realize that the world is a gift which we have freely received and must share with others. Since the world has been given to us, we can no longer view reality in a purely utilitarian way, in which efficiency and productivity are entirely geared to our individual benefit. Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us." (n. 159).

May Our Lady, flower of humanity and the symbol of creation flowering, gain for us the grace this Lent to take steps in listening more attentively to nature's words of love. May she guide us. We owe it to God, to ourselves and to future generations to care for our common home.



+ Brendan Leahy, Bishop of Limerick

Resources

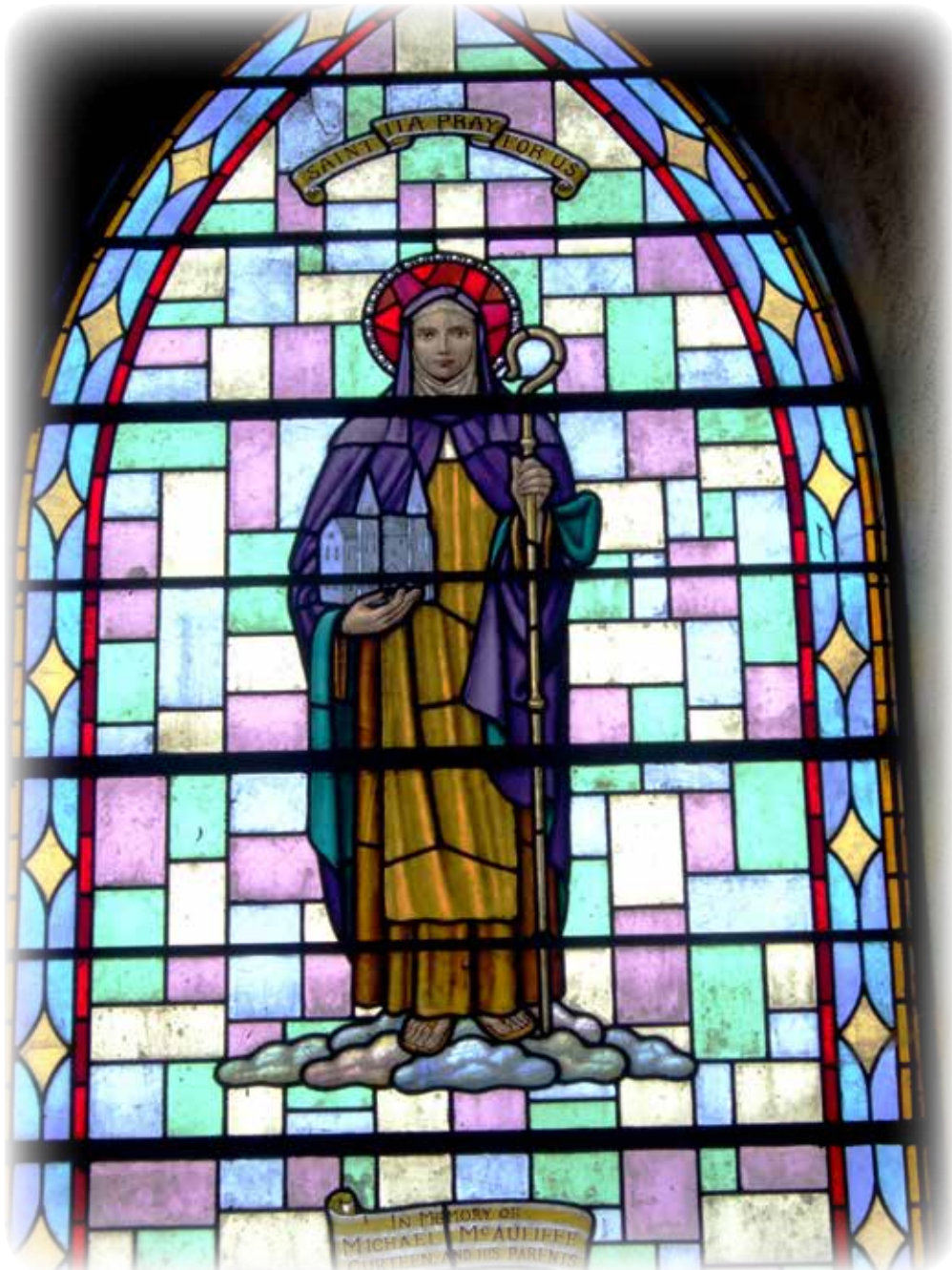
Sean McDonagh (editor), *Laudato Si': An Irish Response : Essays on the Pope's Letter on the Environment*. Dublin: Veritas, 2017.

A short video-clip of the *Laudato Si'* Garden from World Meeting of Families 2018: <https://www.icatholic.ie/wmof2018-our-common-home-garden/>

Information about becoming an **eco-parish**: <https://www.ecocongregationireland.com/>

Resources for the 2019 Season of Creation are still available on the Irish Bishops' Conferene website, including podcasts and liturgical resources. See www.catholicbishops.ie.

The Laudato Si Pledge – <http://livelaudatosi.org/>



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