



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Bishop Michael Olson on Pope Francis' Encyclical *Laudato Si*

In the first chapter of the Book of Genesis we read how God created the heavens and the earth; God created man and woman in His image and likeness -- to whom He entrusted the fruits of the earth to sustain life.

In his Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis appeals to all men and women of good will to exercise our God-given responsibility for stewardship of all creation. The Holy Father reminds us that selfishness regarding the resources of creation will jeopardize our common human prosperity and threaten us with moral and social calamity in the 21st Century.

Pope Francis explains in his encyclical that human ecology and natural ecology form an integral ecology. As the Pope told the European Parliament last year, "Respect for nature calls for recognizing that man himself is a fundamental part of it." In so doing, the Holy Father eschews the relativism of so much of contemporary theory by appealing to one of the last vestiges of moral absolutes held by popular opinion, that is, respect for the environment.

Today, people of the world relate more easily to one another no matter where we live. We also relate to the environment around us, integrally woven by God into the fabric of our lives, affecting each and every living creature including other human beings. If we damage or destroy the environment, the Creation that God gave to us, we damage or destroy human beings. God intended for us to use His creation for the common good of each and every human person in order for each of us to flourish in the global society.

Pope Francis has explained that Creation is not a "property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all," in short, for the common good of all. Personal property rights are essential for the common good and toward a just stewardship of Creation; these property rights are measured by correlative responsibilities for a just order within society. In other words, to separate creation from its relationship to God and to human beings is to reduce creation to the raw matter of consumerism and to exploit families and human communities as objects of an unbridled free market. Such actions have always been considered to be sinful because they show ingratitude toward God and sin violently through acts of commission or omission against our neighbors in the human community.

Through the Encyclical, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis, continuing in line with the teaching tradition of his most recent predecessors Benedict XVI and St. John Paul II, warns that our self-centered culture promotes greed and wastefulness, whether it's an inordinate desire to drive a new car or to eat or to dress extravagantly.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

800 West Loop 820 South • Fort Worth, Texas 76108-2919 • (817) 560-3300 • www.fwdioc.org



DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH

Pope Francis particularly warns us of the evil of our “*Throw Away Culture.*” The advancements of modern civilization, unhinged from such moral absolutes as human dignity, have created a culture where all is to be treated as disposable. This approach especially assaults the dignity of the weakest and most vulnerable of human beings within our worldwide community: including the poor, the sick, and the unborn. The Pope has said that in this culture, “Human beings are themselves considered to be consumer goods to be used and then discarded.”

Laudato Si calls on us to be responsible for God’s Creation, the planet on which we live, because what we do affects other people within what the Pope calls our “common home.” It means that the natural ecology and the human ecology are so united that one affects the other. It means that we must nurture and protect our environment as grateful stewards of what God has entrusted to us. It means that to do so is to act in a way in which we care for the least and weakest of our brothers and sisters among us.

THE CATHOLIC CENTER

800 West Loop 820 South • Fort Worth, Texas 76108-2919 • (817) 560-3300 • www.fwdioc.org