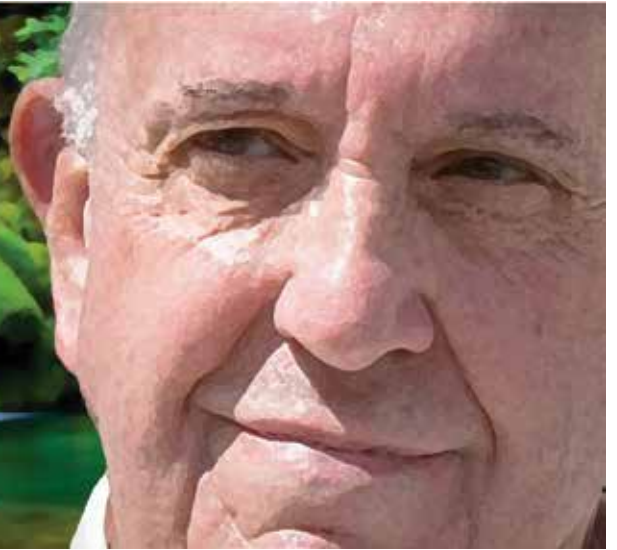


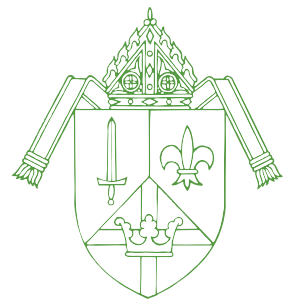
D I S C O V E R I N G

Laudato Si

POPE FRANCIS PHOTO: ANTOINE MEKARY/ALETEIA



A Small Group Study Guide



CATHOLIC DIOCESE
OF LEXINGTON

DISCOVERING



A Small Group Study Guide

More than fifty years ago, with the world teetering on the brink of nuclear crisis, Pope Saint John XXIII wrote an Encyclical which not only rejected war but offered a proposal for peace. He addressed his message Pacem in Terris to the entire “Catholic world” and indeed “to all men and women of good will”. Now, faced as we are with global environmental deterioration, I wish to address every person living on this planet. In my Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, I wrote to all the members of the Church with the aim of encouraging ongoing missionary renewal. In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home.

From *Laudato Si*, Section 3

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CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF LEXINGTON

Table of Contents

Introduction To Catholic Social Teaching	4
--	---

Introduction To This Booklet	7
------------------------------------	---

Excerpts From Laudato Si

I. Facing The Problem	9
-----------------------------	---

II. Dominion & Stewardship.....	11
---------------------------------	----

III. The Throwaway Culture	13
----------------------------------	----

IV. Power & The Technocratic Paradigm	15
---	----

V. The Technocratic Paradigm in Wealthy Nations	18
---	----

VI. Integral Ecology	20
----------------------------	----

VII. The Patron Saint of Integral Ecology	23
---	----

VIII. Little Changes.....	25
---------------------------	----

Final Reflection.....	27
-----------------------	----

Introduction To Catholic Social Teaching

Two thousand years ago Christ told the crowds that the Kingdom of God was at hand. Many were puzzled: “Where is it?” they asked. “When is it coming?” Two thousand years later we have similar questions: “It’s been so long,” we say. “Why isn’t it here yet?”

Christ also told people to love God with their whole being, and to love their neighbor as themselves. This teaching stunned the Pharisees. “But why?” we ask. “What makes it so radical?”

Christ even baffled His own disciples. He told them that He was in the Father, and that they were in Him. He told them that He was the vine, and they were the branches. Apart from Him, He said, they could do nothing.

Most controversially, Christ taught that unless we eat His flesh and drink His blood, we will not have life within us. He was talking about the Eucharist, through which we enter communion with God. Here is the answer to our questions: this teaching unlocks the others.

If we are in communion with God, then He is in us, and we are in Him. If many of us are in communion with God, then we are also in communion with one another. If we are in communion with God, we will love Him with our whole being. If we are in communion with God, we will love all His children as He loves them. Then we will love our neighbors – all our neighbors – as ourselves.

The Kingdom of God is not a time or place. It transcends the very idea of time and place. It is a communion that encompasses Christians of all times and places, living and dead. It flows from God Himself, and links us together through the eternal presentation of the Eucharist, which is the flesh of Christ.

Saint Paul taught the Philippians that such communion grants us the same mind, love, and understanding. He told them it was the key to both evangelization and charity, and would make them “beacons to the world, upholding the message of life.” Paul’s message is timeless: through communion in Christ, we reach out to the world in love. Through that love, we bring others to truth, and then into communion.

Christ held up these teachings as inseparable, but it wasn’t long before humanity began wedging them apart. In His time on earth Christ resisted the reductionist, legalistic teachings of the Pharisees. In the years since, the Church has fought other forms of reductionism. Humanity has tried it all: the separation of faith and works, the separation of truth and charity, and many more. For two thousand years the Church has held Christ’s teachings together in the face of such attempts. It has been a bumpy ride.

That ride began within a hostile Roman culture. Christ had spoken of communion and

taught that love of neighbor included care for the poor. The Roman view was different: take care of your family and social network, but no more. Roman duties to the poor – and the gods – were simple: bribe them both to preserve the status quo. No riots, no natural disasters, no problem. To the Romans, more than that was unnecessary.

Roman persecutions forced the Church underground. Masses were held in catacombs or people's homes. The Church was unable to conduct organized charity efforts, but these early Catholics found a way. They found personal ways to help the poor and destitute. Slowly, such intimate encounters with Christ's love opened the Romans to Christ's truth. By loving God and neighbor, the early Church fulfilled another of Christ's commandments: go forth and make disciples of all nations.

After the persecutions ended, the Church found itself in a different world. Catholics could openly build churches and worship God. They could also organize large-scale efforts to love their neighbors. Hospices and hospitals, relief centers for the poor, the elderly, and the destitute: the early Church built them all. The world had changed, and the Church was able to change with it.

The world continues to change. For two thousand years the Church has navigated a world of shifting ideologies, political systems, and economic philosophies. Every time the world changed, the Church had adapted its teaching to contemporary problems. Such adaptations were and are a matter of approach and methodology, not of content. Yet while the message doesn't change, the world does. The Church has to be in constant dialogue with the world to deliver its message.

The current phase of this dialogue began 125 years ago, when Pope Leo XIII diagnosed the condition of the modern world. Looking out at a working class steeped in misery and poverty, Leo saw a world crafted by systematic ideologies. These ideologies were creating the structural causes of the workers' plight. Part of helping the workers, Leo contended, was confronting the systems that were oppressing them.

Leo's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (*On the Condition of Labor*) pointed to two major problems. The first was the ideology that had created oppressive conditions for the working class: unregulated, laissez-faire capitalism. By holding up profit as the highest product of human work, capitalism had dehumanized the working class. Leo held that this system concentrated wealth and capital in the hand of a financial oligarchy, and transformed workers into replaceable cogs in a profit machine.

The second problem, Marxism, was a false solution to the first. Marxists argued that the wealthy should be overthrown, and that all capital and property should be controlled by the

government. They believed this would end the misery caused by unregulated capitalism.

Pope Leo told the world that Marxism was no solution at all. It subjected the worker to the absolute power of the government, rather than the unchecked power of the capitalist. Marxism was just as dehumanizing, just as reductionist as the system it claimed to fix. Both were atheistic, both ignored human dignity, and both reduced people to cogs in an economic machine. Unregulated capitalism and Marxism were simply different sides of the same coin.

Leo argued that capital and labor were out of balance. Wage slavery had to stop: capitalists should not work people all day, every day, for pennies a day – especially not children. This would require labor unions and government regulations. While not condemning wealth, Pope Leo forcefully argued that all classes of people should be able to own property and provide for their families.

The Church responded magnificently to Leo's call. From Chesterton's *Distributism* to Father Plater's *Catholic Social Guild*, from Father Ryan's *The Living Wage* to Dorothy Day's *Catholic Workers*: two generations of Catholics helped usher in a wave of reforms. Soon workers were protected by labor unions, a standardized work week, a minimum wage, and child labor laws. The Church was bringing the Gospel to the modern world, and the new phase of dialogue had begun.

That dialogue has progressed rapidly since the time of Leo XIII. There have been dramatic crescendos under Pope Saint John XXIII and Pope Saint John Paul II, and quiet reflections under Pope Benedict XVI. The Church's dialogue with the modern world is the accumulation of such moments. Over time, the Church's half of this dialogue has coalesced into a body of doctrine. That doctrine is known as *Catholic Social Teaching*, and the Church has compiled it in *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. For those interested in further reading, the Compendium is freely available from the Vatican's website. It can also be purchased as a book.

The Church's dialogue with the world is now a 2,000 year old tradition. The world has changed quite a bit in that time, spinning out new forms of reductionism along the way. The Church has weathered them all. In every age, the Church has found a way to bring the Gospel to a world that desperately needs it.

In that sense nothing has changed. Now as ever, the Church is called to dialogue with the world. Yet many things are different. Technology and society are being reshaped at a breathtaking pace. Change is not an evil, but these rapid transformations are leaving some people behind, and running others over. The world is spinning so fast these days that disorientation seems like the new normal. We want to act, but it's hard to know what to do and how to do it. We need to slow down and take stock. We need a fresh diagnosis of the world's condition.

Pope Francis has given us that diagnosis. In *Laudato Si*, the Pope pulls back the curtain to reveal the structural problems plaguing our world. Of these, Pope Francis is markedly concerned about environmental issues. A large part of *Laudato Si* is dedicated to that topic.

Yet *Laudato Si* is more than a papal commentary on climate change. Pope Francis views environmental problems as lethal in their own right, but also as symptoms of a larger disease. That disease is the reductionism of our age, which Pope Francis calls the “technocratic paradigm.” In *Laudato Si*, the Pope demonstrates that many of our greatest problems are caused by this same disease. He provides us with a shocking moment of clarity, the pause we need to reorient ourselves for mission in today’s world.

The technocratic paradigm disorders the relationship between God’s children and His creation. It also disorders the relationships between the children themselves. Yet this is not an incurable disease. The remedy is found in Scripture and Tradition: the proper ordering of relationships between God, humanity, and creation that Pope Francis calls “integral ecology.”

It’s probably clear by now that *Laudato Si* isn’t lacking in big ideas. What really defines the document, however, is Pope Francis’ ability to present these ideas in a concrete and personal way. The big ideas are there, but more of *Laudato Si* is dedicated to the realities on the ground, and what they have to do with us.

The latter is *Laudato Si*’s real strength. It is direct and accessible, aimed at lay people rather than academics. Pope Francis is addressing the citizens of the world. His message is not for a privileged few: he is speaking to us all.

Laudato Si was released at a pivotal moment in the Church’s dialogue with the world. The timing was no accident: the Pope’s message is urgent. We need to hear it now. Let’s get started, then, and see what he has to say.

Introduction To The Booklet

Catholic tradition may be ancient, but it is not static. It is still alive and growing, and *Laudato Si* is an important development in that growth. With *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis has taken up the mantle of his predecessors, diagnosing the world’s condition and offering a cure. Those who have dubbed *Laudato Si* a “revolutionary break from tradition” are quite mistaken: in this regard Pope Francis is very much a traditional pope.

His contribution to the Church’s tradition, however, is unique. The Pope’s development of “integral ecology” has ramifications beyond the present crisis. Integral ecology situates creation within our relationship to God and our neighbor. It demonstrates the inseparability of care for the vulnerable and care for creation. It may well constitute a step forward in our understanding of the Gospel. Integral ecology, then, shows *Laudato Si* to be pure Pope Francis:

traditional and unique at the same time.

The same is true of the obstacles standing in the Pope's way. Many popes have had difficulty transmitting their message to the people. More than any of his predecessors, Pope Francis is constantly confronted with a culture of sound bites and media spin. Ideologues and pundits give us countless interpretations of Pope Francis' words. Many of them contradict each other. The Pope's message is vital, but how can we find it amidst so many distortions?

Ideally, we should read the Pope's words for ourselves. That's easier said than done, though. Today's busy world runs us all ragged. Even if we had the time, we often don't have the energy. Reading the Pope's message in its entirety can seem like an overwhelming task.

This booklet is meant to help readers make a start. It isn't intended to be comprehensive. It wasn't possible to do justice to *Laudato Si* in so few pages. It was possible, however, to pull out passages containing some of the Pope's major themes. We hope these passages will serve as a doorway to Pope Francis' message.

The booklet in your hands contains eight excerpts from *Laudato Si*. Each is paired with discussion points, questions, and prayers. The booklet can be used in any number of formats. A longer study (e.g. eight weeks) might cover a passage a week. A shorter study (e.g. a four-week Lenten group) might cover two passages a week, or simply choose four of the eight.

These formats are only suggestions. Each group will have to decide what format works best for them. Regardless, we hope that each participant will take the time to read all the passages at some point, and perhaps read all of *Laudato Si* when time permits.

I. Facing the Problem

23. The climate is a common good, belonging to all and meant for all. At the global level, it is a complex system linked to many of the essential conditions for human life. A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system. In recent decades this warming has been accompanied by a constant rise in the sea level and, it would appear, by an increase of extreme weather events, even if a scientifically determinable cause cannot be assigned to each particular phenomenon. Humanity is called to recognize the need for changes of lifestyle, production and consumption, in order to combat this warming or at least the human causes which produce or aggravate it. It is true



that there are other factors (such as volcanic activity, variations in the earth's orbit and axis, the solar cycle), yet a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a

result of human activity. As these gases build up in the atmosphere, they hamper the escape of heat produced by sunlight at the earth's surface. The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system. Another determining factor has been an increase in changed uses of the soil, principally deforestation for agricultural purposes.

159. The notion of the common good also extends to future generations. The global economic crises have made painfully obvious the detrimental effects of disregarding our common destiny, which cannot exclude those who come after us. We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity. 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. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: "The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next". An

integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.

1. Climate change is a controversial topic. Not everyone believes that humanity is responsible for changes in the earth's climate. This debate will probably not be resolved anytime soon. In the meantime, however, we can begin to dialogue with each other on specific environmental issues rather than the big picture.

a) Conversations about controversial issues can be difficult. Have you ever watched such a conversation go wrong? What happened? How might that outcome have been avoided?

b) Personal connections often make dialogue easier. Forging such connections takes time. We can begin now, however, by explaining to others why we believe as we do. Consider telling the group why you approach climate change the way you do. Is the topic important to you? Why or why not? Remember that the point is not to argue, but to get to know each other.

c) Disagreement over climate change need not turn into conflict. It is possible to maintain respectful disagreement on the bigger picture, and then turn the conversation to specific issues, such as pollutants in a given waterway or carcinogens in a certain area. Is there such an issue that you feel strongly enough about to bring up? Please make the group aware of it.

2. Christians are called to stand up for the rights of the poor and vulnerable. Most basic of these rights are the necessities of life – food, water, air, etc. Many such necessities depend on a healthy climate.

a) Climate change is especially hard on poor countries, but affluent societies are not immune. How might climate change affect people here? Consider storm patterns; water and crops; pollen, insects, and diseases, etc.

b) The climate is not only a common good in our own time. A healthy climate is a birth-right of our children. How might a changing climate affect their lives? How might resource scarcity affect the relationships between people? Between nations?

c) Unsafe air, water, and food can affect our family and friends here and now. Have you known people who have been affected in this way? If such cases increase, how might the result affect taxes and the economy in our own lifetimes?

3. In today's world, environmental issues are linked to Christ's command to love one another. Climate change intensifies the hardships of the poor, and threatens the well-being of our neighbors and children. It is a structural cause of human misery.

Addressing it begins with conversation and dialogue. If we cannot talk to one another, we cannot work together to tackle climate change – or anything else.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of James 3:13-18. Should this not be possible, pray together for the patience to hear other perspectives.

II. Dominion & Stewardship

67. 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 Judaeo-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. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to “till and keep” the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). “Tilling” refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while “keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and nature. 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). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me” (Lev 25:23).



75. A spirituality which forgets God as all-powerful and Creator is not acceptable. That is how we end up worshipping earthly powers, or ourselves usurping the place of God, even to the point of claiming an unlimited right to trample his creation underfoot. The best way to restore men and women to their rightful place, putting an end to their claim to absolute dominion over the earth, is to speak once more of the figure of a Father who creates and who alone owns the world. Otherwise, human beings will always try to impose their own laws and interests on reality.

83. The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point

of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things. Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator.

1. God gave humanity dominion over the earth. We have the authority to till and keep God's creation. The possession of authority, however, does not justify its abuse.

a) Heads of state have dominion over lands and peoples. For centuries people have argued over why such power exists and how it should be used. What are your answers to these questions? How do those answers apply to humanity's dominion over the earth?

b) Rightful authority can be abused. Talk about a time when you or someone close to you misused their authority. What happened?

2. Creation belongs to God. The dominion He gave us does not negate His ownership. Our authority over the earth, then, is that of stewards over another's property.

a) Talk about what stewardship means to you. What is the difference between a good steward and a bad steward? Have these readings changed your perspective? Why or why not?

3. Christ once told a parable about a man who entrusted his money to three servants. The first two did good business with the money, improving that which had been left in their care. The third did nothing with the money, not even depositing it in the bank to earn interest. When the man returned, the first two had doubled his money. They were rewarded. The third gave the man the money back, exactly as it had been given to him. That servant was punished.

a) The third servant's punishment may strike us as odd. After all, he did not lose his master's money. What might this parable teach us about God's expectations of His stewards? How might that relate to our role as stewards of His earth?

4. Disregard for God's absolute sovereignty distorts the relationship between humanity and creation. The idea of stewardship disappears, creation is demoted to "nature," and our dominion devolves into tyranny. Acknowledgment of God's sovereignty, on the other hand, restores the proper relationship of all that God has made.

All creation has a purpose in God's plan. We are a unique part of that creation, specially created in God's image and likeness. We are God's beloved children, and He has entrusted us with the rest of His creation. We have been made stewards over God's earth. We can choose to be wise stewards, or foolish ones. We can take good care of our charge, or devastate it for our own perceived benefit. We can work with God's plan, or against it. The choice is ours.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Luke 12: 41-48. Should this not be possible, pray together for the gift of understanding.

III. The Throwaway Culture

117. Neglecting to monitor the harm done to nature and the environmental impact of our decisions is only the most striking sign of a disregard for the message contained in the structures of nature itself. When we fail to acknowledge as part of reality the worth of a poor person, a human embryo, a person with disabilities – to offer just a few examples – it becomes difficult to hear the cry of nature itself; everything is connected. Once the human being declares independence from reality and behaves with absolute dominion, the very foundations of our life begin to crumble, for “instead of carrying out his role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, man sets himself up in place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature”.

122. A misguided anthropocentrism leads to a misguided lifestyle. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, I noted that the practical relativism typical of our age is “even more dangerous than doctrinal relativism”.[99] When human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative. Hence we should not be surprised to find, in conjunction with the omnipresent technocratic paradigm and the cult of unlimited human power, the rise of a relativism which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests. There is a logic in all this whereby different attitudes can feed on one another, leading to environmental degradation and social decay.

123. The culture of relativism is the same disorder which drives one person to take advantage of another, to treat others as mere objects, imposing forced labour on them or enslaving them to pay their debts. The same kind of thinking leads to the sexual exploitation of children and abandonment of the elderly who no longer serve our interests. It is also the mindset of those who say: Let us allow the invisible forces of the market to regulate the economy, and consider their impact on society and nature as collateral damage. In the absence of objective truths or sound principles other than the satisfaction of our own desires and immediate needs, what limits can be placed on human trafficking, organized crime, the drug trade, commerce in blood diamonds and the fur of endangered species? Is it not the same relativistic logic which justifies buying the organs of the poor for resale or use in experimentation, or eliminating children because they are not what their parents wanted? This same “use and throw away” logic generates so much waste, because of the disordered desire to



consume more than what is really necessary. We should not think that political efforts or the force of law will be sufficient to prevent actions which affect the environment because, when the culture itself is corrupt and objective truth and universally valid principles are no longer upheld, then laws can only be seen as arbitrary impositions or obstacles to be avoided.

1. The sovereignty of God gives order to human relationships. Denying God's sovereignty casts these relationships into disarray. Humanity is left to struggle against nature and itself as it tries to solve the problems created by God's absence.

a) New technologies allow humanity to manipulate and master nature as never before. Can you think of examples of such mastery? Do some of these new technologies, e.g. genetics, ever make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

b) Humanity is increasingly divided over its relationship with nature. Have you heard extreme views or angry personal attacks based on this division? What has this issue done to humanity's relationship with itself? How?

2. Relativism leads to selfishness. When all truths are equally valid, we end up picking the one that justifies our interests. Divisive ideologies and polarizing rhetoric develop as different interest groups square off in a world without truth.

a) Relativism creates apathy for those topics not related to our immediate interests. Conflict avoidance is the remaining reason for dialogue; shared apathy is our remaining unity. Why might this be? When we don't believe in real truth, what's left worth fighting for? What isn't?

b) A throwaway culture results. We justify using people and things to serve our interests, and discard them when they no longer do. Can you think of times when you saw people used as products? When you saw them discarded? Have you ever caught yourself thinking this way?

3. The consumption and waste of the throwaway culture lie behind many of our environmental problems. Yet some suggest that we solve those problems by doubling down on the throwaway culture itself. This is the argument for population control. It uses environmentalism as a further justification for discarding the inconvenient, undesirable, unborn, and "unproductive."

a) Such an approach shifts environmental consequences onto those who are least culpable and most vulnerable. It victimizes the weak to protect the wasteful. Have you ever thought about it this way? Do you agree? Why or why not?

4. Faith in God's sovereignty and truth puts us in right relationship to creation and each other. Without the solid ground of faith, we can lose our way and fall into the pits of relativism, division, and despair.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of John 14: 1-17. Should this not be possible, pray together for the gift of faith.

IV. Power & the Technocratic Paradigm

105. There is a tendency to believe that every increase in power means “an increase of ‘progress’ itself”, an advance in “security, usefulness, welfare and vigour; ...an assimilation of new values into the stream of culture”, as if reality, goodness and truth automatically flow from technological and economic power as such. The fact is that “contemporary man has not been trained to use power well”, because our immense technological development has not been accompanied by a development in human responsibility, values and conscience. Each age tends to have only a meagre awareness of its own limitations. It is possible that we do not grasp the gravity of the challenges now before us. “The risk is growing day by day that man will not use his power as he should”; in effect, “power is never considered in terms of the responsibility of choice which is inherent in freedom” since its “only norms are taken from alleged necessity, from either utility or security”. But human beings are not completely autonomous. Our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence. In this sense, we stand naked and exposed in the face of our ever-increasing power, lacking the wherewithal to control it. We have certain superficial mechanisms, but we cannot claim to have a sound ethics, a culture and spirituality genuinely capable of setting limits and teaching clear-minded self-restraint.



106. The basic problem goes even deeper: it is the way that humanity has taken up technology and its development according to an undifferentiated and one-dimensional paradigm. This paradigm exalts the concept of a subject who, using logical and rational procedures, progressively approaches and gains control over an external object. This subject makes every effort to establish the scientific and experimental method, which in itself is already a technique of possession, mastery and transformation. It is as if the subject were to find itself in the presence of something formless, completely open to manipulation. Men and women have constantly intervened in nature, but for a long time this meant being in tune with and respecting the possibilities offered by the things themselves. It was a matter of receiving what nature itself allowed, as if from its own hand. Now, by contrast, we are the ones to lay our hands on things, attempting to extract everything possible from them while frequently ignoring or forgetting the reality in front of us. Human beings and material objects no longer

extend a friendly hand to one another; the relationship has become confrontational. This has made it easy to accept the idea of infinite or unlimited growth, which proves so attractive to economists, financiers and experts in technology. It is based on the lie that there is an infinite supply of the earth's goods, and this leads to the planet being squeezed dry beyond every limit. It is the false notion that "an infinite quantity of energy and resources are available, that it is possible to renew them quickly, and that the negative effects of the exploitation of the natural order can be easily absorbed".

1. Humanity has done amazing things with technology and economics in the last 200 years. We can and have used our newfound power for good: in the medical field, for example. By themselves, however, our new capabilities are neither good nor evil. They can be used for either: that depends on us.

a) Our actions reflect the way we see the world. How have we used our new abilities over the last century? Who used them that way and why? What have been the consequences for humanity and the environment? What can this tell us about the dangers of power?

b) Humanity continues to press forward in global finance and new technologies, but we haven't defined a moral system or ethical boundaries for these advances. Why haven't we done so? Why should we? How might the lack of such boundaries put us – and the earth – at risk?

2. Economics and technology have become interwoven. Many today see technology as the means, and profit as the goal. They plow forward in search of that profit, unrestrained by morality or ethics. Pope Francis calls this worldview the "technocratic paradigm," and points out the great evils it has done.

a) The worldwide consequences of this paradigm are easy to find. Discuss one or two examples, then talk about a time when you saw elements of this worldview in your own life: at work, in your community, or with your family and friends.

3. The technocratic paradigm makes us self-centered. It teaches us to see people and things as means for self-gratification. It traps us in a culture of lust and pride that warps the way we view God's creation.

a) Lust objectifies people, transforming them into things used for pleasure. Have you ever seen a person turned into a thing to fulfill someone's personal or economic lust? Does this relate to how our society approaches God's creation?

b) Pride lifts us up above others. It provides the justification for our lustful use of God's children and creation. Pride also opens the door for the other deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, and envy. Talk about why pride is an enabler of other sins. Have you ever seen this in yourself or others?

4. Humility is the escape from this paradigm. It begins with the shocking realization of God's absolute sovereignty. Awe and fear follow. Then another shock: this Creator God – who doesn't need us – sent his Son to redeem and teach us. Love follows, then wisdom, as we slowly begin to understand the proper relationship between God, us, and the rest of creation.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of James 4: 1-10. Should this not be possible, pray together for the gift of humility.

V. The Technocratic Paradigm in Wealthy Nations

109. The technocratic paradigm also tends to dominate economic and political life. The economy accepts every advance in technology with a view to profit, without concern for its potentially negative impact on human beings. Finance overwhelms the real economy. The lessons of the global financial crisis have not been assimilated, and we are learning all too slowly the lessons of environmental deterioration. Some circles maintain that current economics and



technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. They are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion. At the same time, we have “a sort of ‘superdevelopment’ of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation”, while we are all too slow in developing economic

institutions and social initiatives which can give the poor regular access to basic resources. We fail to see the deepest roots of our present failures, which have to do with the direction, goals, meaning and social implications of technological and economic growth.

204. The current global situation engenders a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which in turn becomes “a seedbed for collective selfishness”. 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. In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears. As these attitudes become more widespread, social norms are respected only to the extent that they do not clash with personal needs. 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.

1. Christianity has a complicated relationship with money. Scripture has many things to say on the topic, but it mostly boils down to this: it's ok for you to own money; it's not ok for money to own you. No one can serve two masters, God and money. One will be at the center of our lives. The other will not.

a) The technocratic paradigm orients life toward material production and consumption. The cycle of life it creates is eroding our days of rest, evaporating our time for reflection, and transforming our holidays into celebrations of materialism. Talk about the changes you've seen in your own lifetime. How has this pattern of life affected you and your family?

b) Modern society's profit machine grinds all to grist. God's creation serves as the raw materials and people are reduced to cogs in the machine. Talk about a time when you saw a human being evaluated on purely economic terms. How did it make you feel? Conversely, how would you rate the "unproductive" moments of human life?

2. Productivity and money certainly have their place. There are hard financial realities in life, and many people have others depending on them for security and sustenance. Yet Scripture repeatedly warns about the folly of centering one's life on material pursuits. The need for "more" is never met, no matter how much of our lives we trade for it.

a) The technocratic paradigm is a taskmaster, squeezing more and more productivity out of our lives. It is also a con artist, convincing us that consumerism can fill our growing emptiness. Have you ever seen men and women buy into this lie? What sorts of things were they buying? Have you ever bought into it yourself? How? Why?

b) This cycle of production and consumption isolates and disheartens people. Those who can afford luxury goods and status symbols aren't fulfilled by them. Those who cannot sometimes fall prey to envy and jealousy. Some of these end up questioning their self-worth or falling into apathy and despair. Talk about a time when you or others fell into this trap. What happened?

3. The technocratic paradigm cannot solve the problems it creates. Neither the market nor new technologies can lead us out of these traps. We need a different way of looking at the world.

We find it in Scripture. Christ teaches us to reject covetousness. Our fortunes will wax and wane, but we should always be content with what we have. Wealth should be used to care for our families, the poor, and the Church. So should our time. Wealth is not a means to gratify our desires. It is a means to help and provide for others. If we focus on our relationship with God, all these things will follow.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Philippians 4: 8-13. Should this not be possible, pray together for the gift of fortitude.

VI. Integral Ecology

137. Since everything is closely interrelated, and today's problems call for a vision capable of taking into account every aspect of the global crisis, I suggest that we now consider some elements of an integral ecology, one which clearly respects its human and social dimensions.

139. When we speak of the “environment”, what we really mean is a relationship existing between nature and the society which lives in it. Nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting in which we live. We are part of nature, included in it and thus in constant interaction with it. Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the

ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. 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.

236. It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation. Grace, which tends to manifest itself tangibly, found unsurpassable expression when God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures. The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours. In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life. Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist is itself 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.

1. The technocratic paradigm breaks down the relationships between God, humanity, and creation. It denies God altogether, sets humanity against itself, and makes creation the slave of human lust. It is a structural cause of misery, destruction, and death.

a) If you keep doing what you've always done, you get what you always got. A "structural cause" is the underlying reason you keep doing it. It's a subconscious trap that causes the same behavior over and over. Talk about a time you saw this in someone you knew. Did you try to talk to them about it? Why or why not? What happened?

b) There can also be structural causes for societal and environmental problems. Have you ever thought about the world's problems this way? What do you think of this approach?

2. We need a structural solution to supplant the technocratic paradigm and restore our broken connections. Integral ecology is that solution. It is the anti-technocratic paradigm: an underlying worldview that will cause us to reflexively fix problems, rather than create them.

a) Integral ecology views the "environment" as the relationship between nature and society. That means we must address social and ecological problems together – not separately – to fix the "environmental" crisis. How is this different from most "environmental" solutions? How would this approach change national and global relations and policies?

b) If the "environment" is a relationship between nature and society on a global level, then an "ecosystem" is the local equivalent. It is the synthesis of a local culture with its immediate natural surroundings. Every ecosystem is different; every local culture must find its own synthesis. Describe the culture and ecology of your region. Do they form a healthy ecosystem?

3. Integral ecology is not a program for reform. It is the recognition that humanity and creation have their origin and destination in Christ. It is the restoration of humanity's proper identity and role.

a) Creation was made by God and sanctified by Christ's Incarnation. It is perfectly united to Christ in the Eucharist, as are we. Talk about the place of the Eucharist in your life. What does it mean to you as a Catholic? Does this passage affect your view? How?

4. The technocratic paradigm is like an unhealthy lifestyle. The longer we live it out, the more problems it will produce. Eventually the body will collapse under their weight. *Laudato Si* provides the diagnosis and cure for this unhealthy lifestyle. That cure is integral ecology, the authentic application of Catholicism to the world's contemporary problem: the technocratic paradigm.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Colossians 1: 1-21. Should this not be possible, pray and talk together about the Eucharist, Christ's great gift of himself.

VII. The Patron Saint of Integral Ecology

10. 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.

11. 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.



1. Mercy requires power, and humanity now holds more power than ever before. Christ called us to be merciful; we can now respond to that call on an unprecedented scale. Certainly we have opportunities. The earth is presently "at our mercy" in a very real way. So too are the

poor and vulnerable among us. In both cases, where we have power we are called to show mercy. Where can we learn this mercy?

a) The lives of the saints show us Christ's teachings in action. They model different facets of the Christian life. Many people have found guidance in the example of a particular saint. Pope Francis chose Saint Francis to be his guide and inspiration. What might this tell us about the Pope? Do you have a special connection with a saint? Which one? Why?

b) If we are not careful, the imperative to help creation and the poor can condense into an intellectual endeavor: a work of the head, rather than the heart. The life of Saint Francis reminds us that helping the poor begins with loving the poor. The same goes for creation. Talk about a time when you fell into a purely intellectual understanding of the faith. How did you get there? How did you get out?

c) Saint Francis gives us a wonderful example of love. Yet that example does not always seem practical. Few of us share his calling to a wandering asceticism; his way of life is often not compatible with our responsibilities. Share what you know about Saint Francis. In light of the differences between his life and ours, how might his example inform our lives? What lessons about integral ecology might we take from him?

d) The call to help the poor sounds noble and romantic. Yet realities are greater than ideas. The hands-on approach can be dirty and dangerous. Sometimes people need more help than we can give. Sometimes those in need are themselves angry, violent, or erratic. Have you ever encountered such problems when trying to help the poor? How might we respond to those problems? How might that answer vary based on our talents and time of life?

e) In Saint Francis, the Pope gives us an example of how attitude influences choices, which in turn influence behavior. Have you seen this progression in your own life or that of someone you know? Why does attitude make a difference when the facts remain the same? How can a person change their attitude?

f) Saint Francis' love of the poor and creation stemmed from his overflowing love of God. The same is true for many of the great humanitarians of human history. A strong faith and prayer life is intimately bound up with works of charity. It spurs us to action and protects us from discouragement. Does your prayer life affect your temperament and motivation? How?

2. Through faith we come to prayer. Through prayer we come to love. From love we arrive at action. Charity flows naturally from faith; the two are bound together. Acts of charity can be acts of evangelization: when others see the faith that drives our love, they may want that faith for themselves.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of James 2: 14-26. Should this not be possible, pray together for the gift of faith.

VIII. Little Changes

209. An awareness of the gravity of today's cultural and ecological crisis must be translated into new habits. Many people know that our current progress and the mere amassing of things and pleasures are not enough to give meaning and joy to the human heart, yet they feel unable to give up what the market sets before them. In those countries which should be making the greatest changes in consumer habits, young people have a new ecological sensitivity and a generous spirit, and some of them are making admirable efforts to protect the environment. At the same time, they have grown up in a milieu of extreme consumerism and affluence which makes it difficult to develop other habits. We are faced with an educational challenge.

211. Yet this education, aimed at creating an “ecological citizenship”, is at times limited to providing information, and fails to instil good habits. The existence of laws and regulations is insufficient in the long run to curb bad conduct, even when effective means of enforcement are present. If the laws are to bring about significant, long-lasting effects, the majority of the members of society must be adequately motivated to accept them, and personally transformed to respond. Only by cultivating sound virtues will people be able to make a selfless ecological commitment. 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.

227. One expression of this attitude is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals. I ask all believers to return to this beautiful and meaningful custom. 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.

1. It is easy enough to condemn the problems of the world. It's even easier to point fingers. It is much harder to realize our own role in those problems and do something about it. Yet we must do something. Where can we start?

a) Changing the world is a tall order. Fortunately the Pope is not calling us to ecological crusade. He is asking us to do two things. The first is to adopt the worldview of integral ecology. The second is to swap out our bad habits for good ones. Talk about your own ecological bad habits. Have you ever tried to give them up before? What happened?

b) Vices are habitual bad actions. Virtues are habitual good actions. Every vice has a corresponding virtue, and we overcome vices by cultivating those virtues. Take a look at the good habits and choices the Pope recommends. To which vices do they correspond? Based on our own ecological vices, which of these would help the environment most if we adopted it?

2. Daily routine makes up much of our lives. Much of that routine is made up of habitual actions. A lifetime of good habits can accomplish more than we might imagine. Yet virtuous habits can do more than help the environment. They can also help us break free from the technocratic paradigm.

a) Grace before meals is such a habit. It only takes a moment, but in that moment it briefly reorients us to God. Daily prayer can do wonders in our lives, and change how we see the world. Grace before meals is an easy introduction to daily prayer. What other forms of daily prayer do you know? Do you practice any? Have you ever "lost the habit" of daily prayer? Why?

b) The constant noise and bustle of today's world stands in the way of prayer. A prayer schedule can help in this regard. A regular day and time for Eucharistic adoration, for example, can give us quiet time with the Lord. Yet it feels like the world fights us on this, and many of our daily habits hinder quiet prayer. What are some of the obstacles to prayer in your life? Does technology play a positive or negative role in this regard? How might you find time for prayer, if only for a few minutes a day?

3. Many of Pope Francis' suggestions take place in the home. The domestic church has always been considered the school of virtues. The home is where we teach virtues to children. The home is where we learn virtue when taking care of the elderly or disabled. If we live alone or with another adult, the home is where we find quiet for prayer and reflection. Like charity, virtue begins at home.

If circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of Matthew 6: 1-34. Should this not be possible, pray together for the grace to change one thing about your life.

Final Reflection

Laudato Si is an exciting read, full of powerful imagery and big ideas. Those ideas can stir our passions, tempting us to leap into action. We may become frustrated, therefore, if the Church seems slow to respond. Yet the delay is not without purpose or precedent. The ideas in *Laudato Si* are rich and deep, and we need time to really digest them. Like the early disciples, we need time for *metanoia*.

Metanoia is a process of repentance and inner transformation. It begins when we encounter Christ, and grows with an understanding of His teachings. Over time we discover the gap between who we are and who God has called us to be. We develop a deep sense of contrition, together with a desire to close that gap. As this transformation progresses, we begin to exchange the old self for the new. It is a process as old as the Gospel: the call to metanoia was issued by Christ and echoed by His apostles.

Metanoia is at the heart of *Laudato Si*. Pope Francis has shown us the gap between where society is and where God has called it to be. He has fostered a desire to close that gap, and shown us how to restore the relationships between God, humanity, and creation. He has echoed the words of Christ: “the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe the Gospel.” He has issued a call to metanoia.

The technocratic paradigm is a distorted worldview that disorders human behavior. It is housed in human hearts and minds, and we need an inner transformation to evict it. Yet metanoia will only take us so far: we must also address the technocratic paradigm’s more tangible effects. Of these, Pope Francis has marked out climate change as a singular danger requiring special attention.

He has not, however, called us to rush headlong into the fray. Recklessness is no better than complacency. Instead, Pope Francis’ call to metanoia makes it clear: we must begin by conforming ourselves to Christ.

Dialogue comes next: the Pope is explicit in saying that unilateral action will not yield positive fruit. We must be inclusive and deliberate in our approach. This does not preclude immediate action: it personalizes it. Pope Francis has given us many little tasks we can begin right away.

In lieu of rash actions, we have been blessed with a period of opportunity. We have been given time to reflect, to absorb, to be transformed. It is a gift: a time to make changes in our lives and lay the foundations for fruitful dialogue. The time for larger responses will come. When it does, we must be prepared to work together.

We may have to abandon pet projects or preferred methods to do so. If we act as a parish, we must be prepared to bend to the pastor's direction. This may be difficult: working together can be hard on the ego, and we will have to resist the temptations of pride. This will require spiritual growth and metanoia. We must become Christ's disciples in order to do His work. That is where we go from here.

As a final exercise: if circumstances permit, consider a prayerful reading of 2 Corinthians 7: 8-13. Should this not be possible pray together for the grace to become the person Christ has called you to be.