

[Pope Francis's Vision for Civic and Political Love in the Context of Care for our Common Home](#)

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“Our common home” is a phrase used frequently in Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si*. What exactly does this phrase mean? Earth is shared by billions of people, all of whom live very different lives. The earth will always be the common home for all of life and its inhabitants. Mother Earth, as it is so frequently referred to, provides everything needed to sustain all types of life. Pope Francis teaches us that we must work together to preserve our common home. It is in our best interest as children of not only God, but of Mother Earth, to do all that we can to ensure that we do not compromise earth’s holiness and grace. We are taught as Christians that God’s grace should sustain us throughout our lives. We are taught from a very young age to live life with open hearts, homes, minds, and arms. We do this by allowing our actions to speak for us. How many times does something negative have to occur before it becomes apparent to us that things need to change? We like to ensure our home and belongs are neat, safe, and delightful. Yet our common home is filthy, detrimental to human health and society, and full of sadness. Take, the ocean for example, we might see it as a beautiful destination with nice waves to catch, but it is filled with garbage and sea creatures are dying because of it. How can we encourage everyone to share the concerns that they have for their personal belongings with our earth and its environment? By defining what love is through that of Christian tradition we can further examine ourselves in terms of how we live out this Christian tradition. Love is the foundation to happiness, so by looking at civic and political love, we can gather a closer look at the link between love and service as Pope Francis describes all throughout his book.

To pinpoint commonalities between one another may seem challenging. Without having a mutual understanding of what our common home is, one cannot grasp the full meaning and appreciation of *Laudato Si*. We all have the ability to experience the beauty of God's creation. No matter how old we might be or where we might be, we can still experience the beauty of this through nature. Nature, which can be seen and experienced differently by many, is the common denominator for each of our homes, or cities. Everyone wakes under the same sun, gazes up at the same stars, and drifts away under the same moon. Suddenly it makes distance from others seem so small because through God and His creation we are all so closely intertwined, we might not even realize. This home, that we all share, can be treated as a city. St. Augustine defines a city as "an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by their objects of love" in his book, the *City of God* 19:24. By focusing on home as a city, it can be better understood how our individual love and interests impact others on a global scale. This home also relates back to ecology and the environment as "The word 'ecology' contains the prefix 'eco,' which derives from the Greek word *oikos*, signifying 'home' or 'dwelling.'" (Mongrain 91). By having this understanding, it can motivate us to align our interests and loves with all scales of life and in turn, we can prioritize the lower levels of earth. Pope Francis recognizes how love is versatile and can take shape in many different forms such as politically and civilly. It is with this love that we form our city, together, in harmony with each other and our common home.

Civic and political love is addressed in chapter six, section five of *Laudato Si*. This section begins with describing how love for all is possible but challenges us to consider how we live. By examining our "lifestyles," we can see what we truly value:

care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion. Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters. Fraternal love can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us.

That is why it is possible to love our enemies. This same gratuitousness inspires us to love and accept the wind, the sun and the clouds, even though we cannot control them. In this sense, we can speak of a 'universal fraternity.' (*Laudato Si* 228)

We are all connected as children of God, as we are made in his image and likeness. By living out our lives in communion together, united by this love for each other, we can properly care for our common home. Life is no longer about how we stand as individuals, it is about how we stand together. Together, change can happen. Together, we can change the world, but alone, we cannot do much. By freely and graciously accepting God's love and living it out, we can work towards this change. So many things in life are monetized, but the love we partake it is something we can live out freely. By being able to live this out freely, everyone has the opportunity to make positive change to the world.

Pope Francis warns us in his book of the destructive, individualistic behavior we are currently living out. This behavior has resulted in pollution, global warming, decreased availability of natural resources and biodiversity, and an overall decrease in quality of life. Actions speak louder than words and saying we are united by our love for each other and our common home means absolutely nothing if we do not show it. Sadly, this is exactly what we are doing and even Pope Francis notices this behavior and instructs us:

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. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment. (*Laudato Si* 229)

Social life today is dominated by social media, teaching us to care most about how many followers we have, or how many likes or views we get online. People spend more time

communicating through words on a tiny screen than looking into someone's eyes and speaking face to face. Communication through social media is all too common and each day we allow ourselves to be consumed with technology, we are further straying from our human connections. By failing to see the beauty right in front of us, we are knowingly neglecting our common home. Wouldn't you rather be able to see and experience the beauty in nature through your own eyes, rather than through a photo you did not even take? By failing to see this big picture we are becoming emotionally detached to the world and disconnecting from not only ourselves, but from others as well. The state of pain that our earth is in, does not affect us because we are not embracing it and recognizing its importance as a call to change. We need to realize that we need to embrace the struggle together in order to take a turn towards the good.

Realizing we are connected through our love for each other might be hard to see. Some people spend their entire lives in search of someone or something to love. Love does not have to mean marriage, which might be what people believe due to its connotation. Love can be used for the search of happiness, by finding the people in our lives that make us feel safe, sound, and secure. Dante Alighieri well expressed this search for love in his *Divine Comedy*. His poetic descriptions of civic love in hell, purgatory, and heaven bring readers along his journey to harmony. His journey can show readers how to be one with each other through love. United by love for each other and God's love for each of us we "pray that blessed one who has the power to aid [us] in [our] need. See that [we] follow [Him] with such devotion [our] heart adheres to every word [He] says" (*Paradiso* XXXII 148-152). Dante's journey helps us re-imagine living and loving well together as a process of being interconnected by God's love; with this love we can overcome our divisions. Dante's journey also proves that we cannot accomplish things on our own, no matter how hard we try. Virgil, Beatrice, and Bernard loved Dante by serving as his

guides in his journey. According to his *Divine Comedy* they were sent by God. These guides not only helped Dante in the fictional sense, but also in his life as he was able to search for truth, goodness, and beauty. This led to his search for harmony which ended at the Mystic Rose. Harmony was depicted by describing the bee's actions with this rose, as "on entering the great flower they spread about them, from tier to tier, the ardor and the peace they had acquired in flying close to Him" (*Paradiso XXXI 16-18*). The bees worked together, in harmony, working together with God's love.

In order to provide for our common home and work to eliminate our destructive ways, we need to place more focus on human connections instead of our technological connections. These human connections can be an action so small such as holding the door open for someone or smiling at someone. These small gestures will go much further than disgruntledly burying our noses into our phones, becoming so distracted we walk straight into doors. Saint Therese of Lisieux encourages:

us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms. (*Laudato Si 230*)

To care for our common home and perform the little actions towards it, we need to be able to do that for ourselves and others first if we want to be successful. One way to do this would be to limit our use of technology for recreation purposes because "humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads" (*Laudato Si 102*). While technology has come a very long way, we are becoming too dependent on it and substituting our much-

needed human connections with text messages and emails. This lack of human connection and excess of technology is doing more harm than good. Mental health and physical health are suffering. If we cannot take care of ourselves, we cannot take care of our common home.

Human health is also suffering from sedentary lifestyles, especially when our eyes are glued to our screens. Being so engulfed by technology to the point where our health is suffering shows how “our freedom fades when it is handed over to the blind forces of the unconscious, of immediate needs, of self-interest, and of violence” (*Laudato Si* 105). By letting our freedom fade, we are inhibiting our abilities to come together and love each other and our common home because it might go against the standard social norm of present day. If we let these destructive ways get in the way of our mental and physical health, we will not only struggle to love others and our common home, but also ourselves. To maintain our physical and mental health, we exercise, eat healthy, get adequate sleep, and do things we enjoy. We perform these activities innately; we do not wait to be physically and mentally destroyed before we begin to improve ourselves. If we happen to go down a path where we cannot improve our health ourselves, we ask for help. If we choose not to wait until the point of complete despair before we work to get better for ourselves, why are we doing this to our common home? We are choosing not to love it and ignoring the signs of what love entails:

love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones”.^[156] That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love”.^[157] Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity”.^[158] In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society.

When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us. (*Laudato Si* 231)

By loving ourselves and others we are able to have this social love that Pope Francis describes.

This social love should be the backbone of society. When we choose to care and love not only ourselves, but others as well, the decisions to better our common home will come at ease and the right decisions will be made. Humans will begin to love their homes.

One may argue certain ways of life are not for them. For example, some may choose to stay out of politics, yet Pope Francis describes this type of political love, but he also realizes that everyone is different. That is what makes us special. By bringing in all of our differences we allow for this unique unification. We are able to use all of our different talents and gifts to care for our common home. Pope Francis clarifies that not all are called to be politicians, but all are expected to carry out their love as members of the “polity,” as members of the one human family, sharing its home. A “polis” is a city and due to the fact, all humans live together we are all political, social beings, even if we do not realize it.

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. (*Laudato Si* 232)

By contributing our different gifts and talents, we are coming together as a community, just as the bees were moving in harmony at the Mystic Rose. Real change cannot occur without this

community. Someone's strengths may be another person's weakness, but by focusing on collaboration rather than competition, we can bring together our strengths to care for our common home.

The beauty of human nature and being human is that we have this amazing ability to express how we feel through speech, emotion, and body language. Nature, on the other hand, does not have this ability in the same sense as humans do. By observing nature, we can learn how it does speak to us and "when we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them" (*Laudato Si* 87). St Francis of Assisi lives this idea out and encourages it as expressed in his hymn:

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
 especially Sir Brother Sun,
 who is the day and through whom you give us light.
 And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;
 and bears a likeness of you, Most High.
 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. [64] (*Laudato Si* 87)

It is up to us to work together by caring for our common home and to be a voice for our common home and work to improve it. Christianity teaches from a very young age to live as Jesus would. This means putting others before us and working to better the common good. Pope Benedict XVI clearly connects love and the common good through his idea of "an 'ecology of man,' based on the fact that 'man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will'" [120] (*Laudato Si* 155).

The insights presented in *Laudato Si* are compelling in the sense that there is something for everyone. Pope Francis recognizes all of our differences with our likes and interests and tries to cater towards everyone in his encyclical. By doing so, he not only addresses concerns regarding our common home, he also raises the value of importance of each of its readers. His book is a success even if just one section sticks with a reader because collectively, the more people that engage with his encyclical, more people will gain a sense of purpose. We are all put on this earth for some reason and we may spend our entire life searching for it, as we see in St. Augustine's *Confessions*. This book brings us through St. Augustine's journey to find his purpose and way towards Christianity. Even if we cannot find the words to describe our purpose, we know that in some way it includes helping each other and our common home. Finding our way, self, and purpose can be a difficult journey as "a human being as such is a huge abyss" (*Confessions* 4.22; Ruden, 96). Individually we might struggle along in our journey, but we will always find our way with our community as "true friendship is what you glue together between those who cling to you when love floods our hearts through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us" (*Confessions* 4.7; Ruden, 81). This sense of friendship formed through love allows us to care for our city, our common home, out of compassion for all. The means to reach that conclusion might be different for everyone but by working together we can work to conquer it all by allowing for positive changes to be made regarding pollution, global warming, availability of natural resources and biodiversity, as well as working to promote an overall increase in quality of life.

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