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T/RS 122

22 May 2020

Pope Francis's Vision for Civic and Political Love in the Context of Care for our Common Home

In the world today, we humans are always in a constant rush. We tend to race against the clock and have tunnel vision on what needs to be done. Our thoughts continually shift through memories of the past to future aspirations. We hardly take the time to focus on what's right in front of us. We have difficulty with being in the present with little time to reflect. Why do we rush through life?

Our technical world causes all activities to become competitive. Human beings are go getters who prioritize power and greed. We lack empathy towards ourselves and others. This absence of affection also contributes to the unstable relationship we have with Mother Earth. Pope Francis recognizes this issue in his publication of *Laudato Si'*. He emphasizes that humans must love all of God's creations. This means it is our duty to love and respect ourselves, enemies, our planet, and all other species of the earth. Due to our lack of appreciation for the Lord's creations, chaos arises. Most importantly, the common home we share, the Earth is in a disastrous state. Our planet is suffering from an ecological crisis as a result of our actions. We have caused pollution, climate change, a loss of biodiversity, deforestation, a decrease of natural resources and so much more. The earth is slowly deteriorating. Pope Francis encourages us to alter these issues of our common home with his vision of political and civil love. He instructs,

“We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others as the world, and that being good and decent are worth it” (Laudato Si, par 229). We have a duty to recognize our wrong actions of greed and selfishness and unite through love to take care of our surroundings. Unity of all and the commitment towards the Earth is essential. The Pope’s vision is inspiring and should be utilized by all, several personal experiences and teachings further support his idea of using love to mend situations.

The book *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, discussed the main topic of love and how it can be used as a guide towards life. The way the author analyzed the love *philia*, has a direct correlation with Pope Francis’ message of fraternal love. Pope Francis explains this in the following quote, “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” (Laudato Si, par 228). He advises the first step of solving the ecological crisis is by loving our brothers and sisters, including your enemies. We must respect all of God’s creations regardless of past situations. The friendship between Dante and Virgil is a similar example of respecting and creating bonds with unfamiliar people. While in the Dark Wood, Dante noticed a figure in the background. The figure approached him and introduced himself as Virgil. Virgil offered Dante help to guide him up the hill after seeing he was having a tough time finding an outlet out of the Dark Wood. Dante agreed, and Virgil served as his spiritual GPS throughout the book. Their friendship blossomed as the story progressed. Dante would not have made it to Paradise without Virgil by his side. Virgil’s presence was a prominent part of Dante's spiritual journey. Dante was able to identify his sin and improve his morals through salvation and repentance. This friendship is proof of how important it is to show love towards others.

Friendship symbolized a blend of affection, loyalty, and respect. It is something that is long lasting. The beauty of relationships is that they give perspective and place people in the right direction. They provide perspective and allow people to see what might not have been clear before. This lesson supports the Pope's vision because it shows the benefits received when working together. If we create valuable bonds with our brothers and sisters, it is much easier to achieve a common goal, such as altering the ecological crisis. We can do so much more together, then we can do alone.

The message received from the movie *The Mission* directed by Roland Joffé, is another illustration of Pope Francis' vision of political love. It is our responsibility as human beings to respect ourselves and all our fraternal brothers and sisters in order to achieve our common goal. This lesson can be compared to the relationship between Father Gabriel and the Guaraní and his relationship with Rodrigo. The love Father Gabriel had for these people, followed the Ignatian value, men and women for others. He made it his duty to live his life for others through the faith of God regardless of the differences he may have with them. The Guaraní were considered the outcast of Europe. Many believed they were incompetent and lacked human characteristics necessary to live a fulfilling life. As a result of these beliefs, the Guaraní were sold to into slavery to the superior Spanish officials. Luckily, Father Gabriel saw the Guaraní in a different perspective. He believed they were just as capable as any other individual. He decided to create a mission within the Guaraní residence to show his love towards them and the Lord. The relationship between them was successful and so was the creation of the mission. His love proved that a fusion of two lifestyles is possible despite the differences that may occur. Pope Francis further supports the blending of two lifestyles with the following quote, "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” ” (Laudato Si, par 231). It is important to recognize that there is always a point in life where we need help and are more victorious with the company of someone else. In addition, the bond between Father Gabriel and Rodrigo demonstrates the possibility of supporting an adversary. Prior to his work at the mission, Rodrigo was a sinner in the eyes of many after he killed his brother because of a shared love interest. Rodrigo was scarred from this experience and lived with guilt and depression. His actions forced him to be exiled for a period of time. His life slowly turned around after meeting Father Gabriel. Despite Rodrigo’s reputation of being a murderer, Father Gabriel saw good in him. He asked him to join him in creating a mission with the Guaraní if he were to accept his penance. Rodrigo complied and joined him on creating the mission. Things slowly began to change for Rodrigo due to the offer he was given. He showed and received love from both the Guaraní and Father Rodrigo regardless of what occurred in the past (murdering his brother and kidnapping the Guaraní for slave trade). Furthermore, he turned his focus towards God and became a Jesuit. This transition of a lifestyle is significant when discussing the act of political love. There is so much good in showing love towards all types of people, it truly can go a long way. Regardless of our backgrounds / beliefs, we are all children of God. Love and respect do not discriminate, as we come from the same father. This connection should make relationships stronger and have us all unite for our common home.

Although our earth has been suffering for a while, it has taken us humans some time to hear her call. I believe it is more challenging for humans to connect with the earth, than to connect with others. We are so connected to technology. It is easier for us to build connections with one another than our home / provider, Mother Earth. We need to experience personal growth in order to establish that connection. Personal growth forces an individual to mature and

observe things from different perspectives. There were several experiences throughout my time at The University of Scranton that have strengthened my knowledge of civic love. These two experiences are my study abroad trip to Perú and my current virtual semester.

The most important experience during my travels to Perú was the respect that Inca's give to their land. The Incas are a perfect example of a well-balanced relationship between all of God's creations. They offer their love politically and civically. In my opinion, their most impressive form of love was the respect they have for Pachamama. The term Pachamama comes from the Inca ancient language Quechua, which signifies Mother Earth. The Incas practice rituals where they give offerings to Mother Earth as a way of thanking her for all she has given them. She has supplied them with gorgeous mountainous views, harvest, rain to nourish the plants, and an abundance of natural resources. It is true that some of these rituals can be more outrageous (ex. sacrifice of animals, plants, water) than others, but it is more important for us to reflect on the main message the Inca's demonstrate. They have recognized Mother Earth and have made it a duty to connect with her. The offerings are significant because they teach us to never take the earth for granted. The Earth takes care of us in many ways. It is our duty to reciprocate the favor and give thanks.

My partial virtual experience of the semester has been both bittersweet and eye-opening. I was definitely sad to end my senior year on an abrupt note, but this virtual experience has helped me evolve as a person. The effects of COVID-19 have made me more aware of how important it is to take care of the earth. Even though many people have been upset because of the worldwide shutdown, there have been some great results because of it. Studies have shown that there has been a decrease in air pollution in several large cities. This has occurred due to the decrease in the amount of cars, air travel, and businesses emitting carbon dioxide into the air. We

have seen clearer skies and waters and less shaking of the tectonic plates. This news impacted me, because it shows proof that we are capable of altering the damage done. This is a sign from God, giving us a chance to recognize our mistakes. He is calling for us to care for our common home. This experience has allowed me to strengthen my bond with the earth and do more for our planet. I now see the pain the Earth endures because of our careless actions. We are not being responsible children of God. It is our duty to show love to all his creations, and we have failed. Despite these disappointments, I believe change is possible. Now more than ever, I have made it my duty to show love and teach others how to love our common home.

The time is now that we humans must answer the wakeup call and hear the cries of our planet. It is crucial that we stay in the present and look at the world around us. There are signs all over that show the suffering and pain of our Mother Earth and fraternal brothers and sisters. We lack empathy and connection between one another and the earth. It is necessary that we give and receive the act of political and civic love. It is our responsibility to take action. The words of Pope Francis validate our ability to change and prosper, “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 a honest look at ourselves, to acknowledge our deep dissatisfaction, and to embark on new paths to authentic freedom” (Laudato Si, par 205). We all have it in us to rise above. We just need to be able to recognize the problem and create a plan of action. The suggested plan given to us by Pope Francis is to fulfil our duties of political and civic love. Let us unite the will of all of our brothers and sisters, connect with Mother Earth and give her the love she deserves.

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