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V. CIVIC AND POLITICAL LOVE 228. 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”. 229. 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. 230. Saint Therese of Lisieux invites 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. 231. 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. 232. 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.

[156] BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009) 2: AAS 101 (2009), 642.

[157] PAUL VI, Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace: AAS 68 (1976), 709.

[158] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 582.

What is the first word that comes to mind when thinking of the word, “home?” I immediately think of my family; the people I live with and love. Throughout Pope Francis’s work, *Laudato Si*, we are challenged to reflect on the ‘common home’ we all share; the Earth. As sadly displayed through our streets and oceans, harm to the Earth has harmful effects on our home. Litter and trash pollute our home, causing people and things we love to slowly fade away. We keep our immediate living areas clean, but why can we not take care of our ‘common home’? Throughout the encyclical letter, Pope Francis uses his wisdom and faith to advise humanity that we need to step up in order to save our planet. Specifically, in Chapter Six Section Five, “Civic and Political Love,” Pope Francis discusses the duties of humanity in order to maintain orderly infrastructure. As we battle the current health crisis of COVID-19, an interpretation of his words can be used to advise humans that love and compassion in our daily lives are crucial, as exemplified by the millions of heroes work together in effort to kill the virus.

Pope Francis opens this section with, “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 makes us brothers and sisters.” (*Laudato Si*, 228) With God as our common fraternal figure, we are innately brothers and sisters. Being brothers and sisters living in

communion together, we are called to practice selfless love in caring for one another. Dante's journey in *The Divine Comedy* warns us of the destined afterlife following a life of sinful actions. The sinners depicted in *The Purgatorio* are punished accordingly for the sins they committed on Earth. Although the sinners are repenting their sins through different forms of punishment, they all share the commonality of going against God's wish for humans to live together in harmony. Their betrayal to the heavenly father has earned them the eternity of their afterlife in the Gates of Hell. After visiting *Purgatorio*, Dante crosses into the *Paridiso*. In *Paridiso*, good people are rewarded in the afterlife for the common good they spread throughout their human form. By following God's will of humans to practicing love and compassion in their daily lives, these people are rewarded with a serene and peaceful setting in their afterlives. Using his journey as a guide, Dante reflects the consequences of sinners and God's obedient children. Reflecting on his experience, Dante infers selfish actions are not worth the pain and suffering to come. By guide of his experience and humans still paving our destiny for the afterlife, we can decide the life worth living to determine the path of our eternity.

Moving into the twelfth week of lockdown, following the CDC guidelines to diminish the spread of COVID-19, people are becoming more and more anxious to leave their homes. They are becoming restless and tempted by the warm weather to hold social gatherings and get back into the normal swing of life. The CDC is advising people stay alert of the mandated guidelines of social distancing and the reopening of businesses to ensure public health and safety. Despite their advisories, many people among us are selfishly concerned with their needs for socialization and/or economic matters. Connecting the message Dante spreads through the documentation of his journey, these sinners will not be rewarded in the afterlife. As Pope Francis explains the kinship among humans, we are expected to take responsibility for one another. By breaking the

mandated laws set in place by government health officials, these people are not thinking of the care and common good of their brothers and sisters. Their greed for egotistical motives will not be rewarded in the afterlife, as forewarned by Dante.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, there are millions of health care workers, first responders, and school personnel working around the clock to ensure the needs of our community are fulfilled during this unprecedented time. Knowing the severity of the virus and the risks involved in working on the front lines, workers are showing up to put forth their expertise and efforts each day. People are showing up not for the job itself, but for one another. As Pope Francis says, “We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it.” (Laudato Si, 229) As caretakers of the Earth, we must also be caretakers for those who inhabit it as well, including one another. These workers are exemplifying the duty God has granted us, taking care of one another for the common good of our home. With the intertwining work of our brothers and sisters, or essential workers, the number of infected patients is slowly decreasing. Their generous and contributing efforts has truly earned them a seat in *The Paridiso*, as vividly illustrated by Dante Aligheiri in *The Divine Comedy*.

But, before earning a seat in *The Paridiso*, as depicted in Dante’s work, humans must value the meaning of love and care for one another. Speaking as a graduating Early and Primary Education major, I find it important to instill these values in children at a young age through effective teaching and modeling. Although not on the ‘front line,’ teachers are essential workers too. Each day, they fulfill the duty of educating our youth to inspire and spark their creativity to build a brighter future. During this time, teachers of all levels have been forced to continue their teaching practices through the virtual world. Without physical interaction in the

classroom, teachers have found innovative methods that successfully reach the crucial aspects of child development. With creativity and adaptation skills, teachers have turned spaces of their homes into make-shift classrooms to continue the education of their students.

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.” –BF
Skinner

As educators, it is crucial that we hold a high standard for ourselves. Despite the situation we have been put in with this pandemic, it is still our duty to be a positive role model for our students. Throughout my teaching courses, my professors have always warned myself and my peers that most situations in the classroom happen unexpectedly. But, as an aware and effective teacher, those moments are the most valuable and teachable. Using the current state of the world, we can incorporate meaningful messages into our lessons and curriculum to re-instill the value of community for our students. For example, this course has opened our eyes to many current issues our world is battling. With a good mentor, we (students) have become aware of our surroundings and the working parts that are necessary to overcome this virus. For each of our assignments, we have studied the value of love through theologian works. Using the message displayed in each work, Dr. Olsen has encouraged us to connect it to the world we live in today. With research and experience, we have all been able to open our eyes to the beauty of people coming together to make our home a better place. Additionally, we have had the opportunity to insert ourselves into the situation as inhibitors, or brothers and sisters living in communion together. With that message in mind, Dr. Olsen has inspired students using intellectual works to find the good in others, and exert our love for one another into the care of our ‘common home.’

Being a graduating senior, these assignments have inspired myself as a citizen of our global community and as a future educator ready to make my mark on our rapidly changing

world. Pretty soon, I will be stepping onto the other side of the education system as a teacher, rather than a student. As a teacher, it will be my duty to reach my students in both academic and civic areas. “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.” (Laudato Si, 231) With loving actions and words, I hope to present a paradigm of affection to my future students. With that influence, they will be able to carry the instilled values with them in their daily lives and future endeavors, just as the teachers today are doing for their students. As they create their online learning segments to teach the minds of our youth, they are also proving to these students the importance of being there for one another. The availability of their fun, caring and supportive character has not been lost through the pandemic. If anything, it has shone brighter than before. Not only are teachers showing up on students’ computer screens, but they are also checking in on their over-all well-being. Teachers all over have been organizing and participating in drive-bys past students’ homes, offering kind words, and supporting families during this difficult time.

Though this last semester has been quite a challenging adjustment, it has also opened my eyes to so many possibilities and hope in humanity. In the gracious commencement speech given by Barack Obama to the graduating class of 2020, he emphasizes the importance of humanity working together to build a better world. He advises seniors of their passage into adulthood and their generation’s opportunity to shape the world. Though this speech was directed at high school seniors, I think there are many inspirational and hopeful messages imbedded within to help all survive this trying time. As I listened to the words Obama offered, I felt nothing but hope and excitement for my generation to transform the communities we live in. Moving through this immediate health crisis upon beginning our careers, we can observe the efforts put forth by our essential workers. We can reflect on the results of their hard work and become inspired to have

such an impact on our community that we call home, so soon. Pope Francis, Dante Alighieri, and Barack Obama, all wrote and spoke different words, but they all had one underlying message: build a community based on the value of love. The influence and guidance of their words have inspired so many thus far, and will continue to do so as we tackle this pandemic and rebuild our 'common home,' together.

Citations

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