

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

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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.]

In discussing Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*, specifically section 5, chapter 6, "Civic and Political Love" Francis urges humans to hold responsibility for one another and to love others. During this unprecedented time in which our world is experiencing a pandemic, I believe Francis can be our guide to mending the polarization specifically in the United States during this frightening time. Francis discusses civic and political love in direct relation to what it means to "Care for our Common Home". Francis's described love for the city parallels with other Christian works such as Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy* and Augustine's *Confessions* as well as something as recent as a 2020 commencement speech and a line from a favorite children's author. In our contemporary society, mid-pandemic, we are seeing polarization among the human race that proves ignorance, greed and selfishness. It is in this time of great divide that we are in need of leadership, some sort of a guide, to come to the realization that living together in communion, with the gifts God has provided us, does not mean to selfishly put others in

danger, but rather own responsibility for those around us, practice love, and in this unexpected time, practice compassion. Francis's *Laudato Si*, and other sources can guide humanity through this pandemic, teach empathy, and allow society to come to the realization that it may be time to start over, to begin a new way of life. Francis can lend advice and guide those who believe that seeing friends, getting their haircut, putting others in danger, and proceeding to live life how they want to during a time of suffering, mourning, and heartache is failing to choose the right kind of love. These kinds of choices at this point in society is against Francis's vision for caring for the common good of humanity, and caring for our common home whether it be the Earth, or the local community one resides in.

In Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*, he inspires humanity, "We must regain 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* par.229). In this time when our world is experiencing a pandemic we see those who are stepping up to lead. Healthcare workers, essential personnel, and educators, among so many others are doing their part to do good. Nurses and doctors from all over the country put their lives at risk daily, in order to do good. Without one another, Francis advocates, we are nothing. So why are people not staying home? Why are people undoing the hard work of our healthcare workers? Is seeing your friends right now, and putting your common home and community in danger really worth it? Do you know the impact you have? All of these are questions running through the minds of many throughout quarantine. In *Laudato Si*, Francis poses a thought: "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* par. 231). So is it leadership or love that we see when people lack empathy and compassion when realizing the great monster that Covid-19 is? Neither, it's arrogance, greed and selfishness.

The kind of love Francis speaks of is seen as our nurses and doctors sit with dying patients because their families cannot, it is the teachers checking in on their underperforming students making sure they grasp the curriculum, it is those who are stepping up to provide mutual care that are our society's true leaders. It is not the leaders ignoring an approaching pandemic to hold favor among their fanbase, it is not people getting sick of quarantine and breaking mandates put in place by their state, and it is not those who lack compassion for those who have lost loved ones to Covid-19. The leaders the world needs right now are those taking responsibility for not just themselves, but those around them, it is those individuals who are building a better world. Francis, unknowingly wrote humanity a guide for these trying times. Humanity needs to stand in solidarity to build a better world, and maybe in this case rebuild a better world. Francis wants us to act ethically, and do good for others, love others, love our homes and communities and do charity. If staying home, quarantining, and providing that mutual care means that humanity can be preserved, why do we question it?

In a Class of 2020 virtual celebration "Graduate Together", President Barack Obama gave a commencement speech targeting the younger generation and providing another call to action. In his speech broadcasted on May 16, 2020, he offers an important message, "Doing what feels good, what's convenient, what's easy – that's how little kids think." Amid this quarantine, it might be the easy choice to leave your home, meet up with friends, not wear a mask, go get the haircut you've been dying for, but easy choices are not always the correct ones. Obama concluded his speech leaving the graduates of the Class of 2020 with these words, "I hope that instead, you ground yourself in values that last, like honesty, hard work, responsibility, fairness, generosity, respect for others." These values of mutual love, respecting others, and generosity align with those Francis speaks of in *Laudato Si*. Those in leadership positions are not always

leaders grounded in these values, which we see apparent during these trying times. During this time it is up to our leaders, meaning any individual grounded in the values Francis speaks of whom exemplify shared responsibility for one another, display ethics, and continue to make our communities, country and world a better place. Obama concludes, “If the world is going to get better, it’s going to be up to you.” By being given the gift of life it is our responsibility to care for every other person in our community, in our world. This pandemic is affecting everyone, fortunately for some, it hasn’t directly affected them in terms of losing a loved one, a friend, or a family member. Although we may not be directly affected, it does not mean we can choose to be selfish and choose ignorance. Obama’s call for re-thinking civic and possibly political life and love for others can in fact help us live together now and in the future with greater care.

Francis’s vision for civic and political love and the environmental themes he touches upon can also be located in Augustine’s *Confessions*. In relation to those responding to our present society and preserving our world, Augustine speaks of the gifts that God has given humanity. Since the worldwide pandemic began the planet has changed, smog has cleared, emission of greenhouse gases and fossil fuels has decreased, seismic activity has slowed, and pollution has lessened. These, in contrast to several consequences seen throughout this pandemic, are a source of hope for humanity. Prior to this pandemic humans were taking advantage of our planet, overworking it, and exhausting it. Augustine speaks of preserving God’s gifts, “Thanks be to you, my sweetness and my honor and my faithfulness, my God, thanks be to you for your gifts; but you must preserve them for me, and by doing this you will preserve me, and what you have given me will grow and come to fulfillment, and I will be with you, because it was your gift that I exist at all” (Augustine 33). Augustine acknowledges that God has placed humans on this Earth, and life in itself is a gift. By humans helping to preserve these gifts of

humanity and nature we are able to feel fulfilled. Preserving these gift means several things during this pandemic but two in particular are starkly evident. First, humanity is God's gift to us, and putting others at risk for our own benefit is not preserving God's gift of humanity. Secondly, God's gift of the planet, nature, and all its beauty was not being preserved. Through this pandemic, and the temporary slow of life as we knew it, the planet is able to breathe, and repair itself. The Earth that God created as our home should not be exhausted. It should not take a global pandemic for humanity to realize that the Earth is not being loved correctly. Our planet cannot grow to fulfillment if we abuse it, hurt it, and neglect it. Francis describes love for our common home in *Laudato Si* and embraces that "care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion." (*Laudato Si* 228). What is more common in all humanity except for the fact we all share one common home, planet Earth?

In Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, he addresses love, or the use of incorrect love that was exhibited by sinners in conclusion leading them to their eternal dwellings in Hell. In juxtaposition between the incorrect love of sinners in Dante's *Inferno* and Pope Francis's good love described in *Laudato Si* it is evident that Francis's vision wants to lead humans to choosing the right love and avoiding that in which Dante depicts in the depths of Hell. Humans have both the potential to love incorrectly, or possess bad love, but also love correctly, a good love. Francis claims that good love is the love that makes the world better, the love that practices compassion, and the love that drives us to serve others. During this global pandemic the world is split between those choosing bad love versus those who are triumphantly choosing the good love Pope Francis speaks of in his vision for civic and political love in *Laudato Si*. Every day of the pandemic on the news, in the newspaper, on social media, we hear heroic stories of nurses risking their lives working tirelessly to help Covid-19 patients, we hear of doctors and researchers working to find

a vaccine, we hear of teachers working all day to provide content to students that is engaging. It is unfortunate that with all of these inspiring stories also come stories of sadness, loss, and inequity. This is the incorrect love, loving the wrong things that Dante discusses. Choosing to be ignorant to the global pandemic and consequently putting others in danger is choosing the incorrect love.

In a way humanity can learn important lessons about dealing with this global pandemic through Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*. In pursuing Francis's vision to practice civic and political love as it pertains to caring for our common home. Our common home is planet Earth, which encompasses our country, state, community, and all the individuals that inhabit this Earth alongside us. According to Pope Francis it is our responsibility to care for those around us and this common home. During this global pandemic that means to stay home. Through these various sources, it is clear that the values that Pope Francis speaks of are long-standing values that we need to strive to achieve. The Christian worldview is that humans make a difference, we know that, but do we wish that our difference we make is a positive one? There is significance in asking ourselves "In a few years from now will I be proud of how I acted and persevered through this trying time?" Dr. Seuss put it very simply, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better, it's not."

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