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As we look today at the human impact on the earth, the age scientists now call the "anthropocene" because of the sheer amount of human materials that are becoming part of the permanent geological record of the planet, rarely do we consider a theological viewpoint. Pope Francis provides us with a letter that does just that for Catholics in particular. According to Pope Francis in *Laudato Si*, all humans share God in common; God is the highest good shared by all, and since God can be shared by all, no person can have more or less of God. Augustine, a master rhetorician, also agrees that God is always the highest good or "summum bonum". We should not be fighting over God because no one person can have more of Him than another. According to Augustine, in order to be good, God has to be our main focal point because everything else serves as a distraction. We must "come down from those heights, for then you may climb and, this time, climb to God. To climb against him was your fall" (*Confessions* IV.12.2). Distractions arise when we lose sight of God and turn towards sloth instead of gratitude. If we do not orient our loves, we wind up abusing one another and our home. Following the tradition of Genesis, he says we are made in God's image and likeness. In the Christian tradition, there is a close connection between God and love; indeed, the New Testament includes material that says "God is love." If we are made in God's image, then central to that image is love, which is "why the Church set before the world the ideal of a "civilization of love" (*Laudato Si*, 231). We are made from love and so the only way to sustain life on earth is through love. The power which created all things shall be the power which sets us

free. Therefore, there must be a common ground which establishes a connection between all creatures of earth to work together to care for our common home.

The deterioration of our common home negatively affects all of its inhabitants, and so when civic and political love comes into place, our common home will be cared for. Pope Francis' first section of his writing on civic and political love includes: "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). Among the things that need saving, is our earth, the place all creatures call home. God gifted us with the earth and the bountiful fruits which it provides us, and so we must give back to it. The earth is very important and must be protected by the conscious and unconscious actions people make which deteriorate its existence. One may not see the consequences that are occurring; however, we are in fact slowly losing our only home. The force of love which brings people together is mandatory in order for all to be saved. This kind of love is one in which excepts all for who they are and surpasses the boundaries which make us different. We can apply this notion to St. Augustine in *The Confessions*. On Augustine's journey of finding his way he came to the realization that "my sin was that I sought not in God Himself, but in things he had created- in myself and the rest of his creation- delights, heights, and perceptions of what was true. And right, and in this way, I collapsed into sufferings, embarrassments, and erring ways" (*Confessions* 1.31; Ruden, 33). Since God is our common father and creator, we shall give thanks to Him. Augustine

explains how we should show gratitude for our existence, since God has gifted that to us. Everything in the world is a gift from God, therefore we do not own anything. It was given to us in order to enrich the world and others. It is apparent that conflicts are going to arise between people, however Pope Francis sheds light on the Christian aesthetic of gratitude, which can be also translated into giving thanks. When we think about giving thanks, we may see the correlation to receiving the Eucharist where we give thanks for the entrance of God spiritually and physically into oneself. When God comes together with His followers, it gives them strength and the will to do what they put their mind to. Similarly, when all people come together, they will have the power to save our common home from crumbling. By loving one another, this in return results in care for the common good where no boundaries are present, and which allows love to forgo all differences between people. When people come together in communion, we shall notice the strengthening of all relationships, including our relationship with earth.

In this first section of discussion, it is made apparent that the kindness we show to others should also be applied to the earth. We only have this one planet which we are born on and so we should care for it to the best of our abilities. We shall not neglect all of the wonderful things it offers to us and must come together as one to care for our home. There are instances where horrible incidents occur, but we shall not place blame on anyone. We must deal with what nature has in store for us and learn from the events we live through. Even though we cannot control what happens in our daily lives, we can control how we react to what we are dealt. When Hurricane Sandy touched down, my life took a complete 180. 13 feet of water drowned my house, along with my entire neighborhood. While fleeing the waters which were rushing down the streets, we turned around to pick up other family members who were planning on waiting out the storm. We didn't do this in hopes of something in return, we did this out of the kindness of

our hearts and did not want more people to suffer than they had to. Returning back to the place we called home, my parents first house and where me and my four siblings were raised for 25 years, we knew nothing would be the same. My community came together however and helped each other to the best of their abilities. An electrician down the block, my dad being a mechanic, and just the support from family and friends is what helped my parents to get us back into our home for Christmas. It was not perfect, but my parents wanted us all to be home for Christmas together. We would go to school and work and then back to the house to repair what was broken. Through this difficult time, the support from our community is what helped us rebuild and see the good in this situation. When people come together anything is possible, from rebuilding a home to stabilizing life on earth.

To save our home through developing civic and political love, we have to set aside our own agendas and egos to see what really matters. Since all things are made by God, our existence is dependent on Him, and likewise we all have to depend on one another as well. In this next section it contains words of encouragement on how to go on with life: “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). To realize what is most important, one may have to go on a pilgrimage or a journey to be transformed, similar to both Dante and Augustine. Augustine was always pursuing a good, but it was a lesser good and confessed that these lowest things do have their delights, but not in comparison to you, my God,

who made everything. The just person delights in God's self, and God himself is the delight of those with righteous hearts" (*Confessions* 2.10; Ruden, 43). The world is full of lovely things, but it sometimes trapped Augustine. The beauty of things is what draws us in but can also serve as a distraction from what is most important, which is care for our common home in light of God's love. It's apparent that there are many distractions which set us on the wrong path, therefore we must aim for the highest of goods by ordering our life. By ordering our desires and appetites, we can twist our will to stray away from evils and stay on the path to God. Dante agreed with this and was on a journey of love towards the divine through ordering his own loves. With the help of Beatrice and Virgil, two people whom he loved deeply, he was able to reach the love of God. By being supported by love, he was able to live by their example and reach the highest good, as can we all do as well.

Through Dante's journey we see the many sinners who have put other things before God and so now are being punished. God wants all of his followers to be cared for and live a prosperous life, but one cannot do so if their home is falling apart. People become blinded by their everyday tasks and begin to stray from living a virtuous life. Pope Francis' notion of people being tired of getting dragged down by violence is exactly what the sinners in the *Divine Comedy* are experiencing. As summarized in Book 3 of *The Confessions*, we must learn to stop and think before choosing evil over good. When we judge and commit crimes it taints our nature and in response we are punished by God. However, God will save us and this journey back to God is when our relationship strengthens. This is the case with all relationships in the world, including with our earth. When we stop polluting the environment and leaving trash on the ground, we will notice an increase in the growth of plants and wildlife. The selfish acts of the sinners, whom Dante comes across, were their downfall. However, they can still find salvation

through penance. Just as God is all forgiving, we must do the same and join hands in support of our earth. The sinners are tired of their old ways and so will suffer the consequences in order to reach *Paradiso*, a place filled with “smiling flowers... [and] the sweet stream that flows its grace to [them]” (*The Divine Comedy* 30.77; Alighieri 863). Similarly, as people come together as one to help mend what they have broken, we can restore our earth to its original, flourishing state.

There are many ways in which people can come together and start making changes for the better. In his next section, Pope Francis discusses: “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” (*Laudato Si*, 230). These small acts of love can be as simple as picking up litter off the street when we come across some or to making donations to charities. Through the college of Panuska, I became aware of a woman who would send a thank you letter to a different person every single day. At first these thank you letters were to her friends and family, but soon she would begin sending notes to absolute strangers. By doing so she noticed, what she would call, tiny miracles happening to her. In a world based off of the consumption of manufactured products, it is refreshing to see people giving back. In many cases we are draining our resources out of selfishness. The act of gluttony is one of the 7 deadly sins and is described as too much love directed at a thing/appetite. Those who were gluttonous in *The Divine Comedy* would be punished through “huge hail stones, dirty water and black snow pour from the dismal air” (*The Divine Comedy* 6.10; Alighieri 55). This love is selfish and is not the kind of love that will care for our common home. No matter how small the act of love is, its effect will be

everlasting. These acts benefit both our physical world, but also our own spiritual nature. Taking part in kind acts brings us closer to God when we walk in His footsteps by helping others. Overcoming these misguided loves, which the sinners in *The Divine Comedy* face, will bring us to a love for one another which will aid in our work to care for the earth.

Pope Francis' vision is for all people to come together as one in order to save our depleting earth and our wounded relationships with one another. There is no difference between the love that one person has in comparison to the love of another since God made us out of love, all love is equal. In the second to last section, Pope Francis explains love: "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). It is concluded that we belong to each other but are held back because of our fear of rejection. We cannot let this fear hold us back from pursuing the highest good. When we reach this highest good, we become enlightened and open our hearts to doing

and receiving good. Augustine and Date had different viewpoints of what love was and both took a journey to find it. Augustine was in love with loving and being loved but was unsure of who he was supposed to love and how to do it well. In order to perfect our loves, Augustine gives us ways to do so, including examining our own self and the ways others act around us. From the many advancements which the world makes comes consequences. Increased technology causes an increase in the use of fossil fuels, resulting in pollution. There is also a major problem of littering, where the ignorance of people overflows out of them when one person throws a water bottle on nature's floor. Instead of participating in actions which harm our earth we can turn to actions of love which may be accomplished through a spiritual journey of one's self. As we begin to indulge ourselves in selfless lifestyles, it will soon become a second nature to us. The more we come together as one, the louder our voice will become. The depletion of our home is harming us all and so we must all come to agree that awareness of the problem is key.

No matter how small the act of love is, its effect will be everlasting. These acts benefit both our physical world but also our own spiritual nature because it brings us closer to God when we walk in His footsteps by helping others. When referring back to the film *The Secret of Kells*, Brendan is on a spiritual journey which brings him to valuing nature to a higher degree than before. His curiosity led him to venture out into the woods, with the help of Aisling, which would serve as his passageway to the world beyond his small village. Brother Aiden was able to connect to Brendan's heart and open his eyes to Christ and soon Brendan becomes devoted to preaching and completing the Book of Kells. He fled from his home which was being overcome by warriors, leaving the violence behind and pursuing a life of gratitude and worship. Brendan had never found much interest in his faith and was always consumed by his uncle's demands

until one person opened his eyes to the wonders of his faith. All it takes is one person to assist others in living a more virtuous life. Similar to Brendan, we get overwhelmed by the demands of society and neglect the demands of our earth. We tend to overlook the importance of all aspects of life which include political, economic, and cultural. Shedding love in social life will make it human nature and people will be less susceptible to falling out of loving ways.

It is a hard task to be asked to spread your love to all. Love is precious and can be understood through four different loves: Agape, Eros, Storge and Philia. As Pope Francis concludes his writing on Civic and Political, he writes: “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). Any positive action which assists our common home, such as organizing rallies to bring awareness, will in time prove effectful. No matter your ethnicity or political viewpoints, gender or financial status, it is encouraged that people contribute to society in their own ways. During this time in the world, the Coronavirus has brought out the love of communities. This may be hard to believe because this is also a time

filled with conflict of interests in politics and many uprisings have occurred. However, seeing how many people are suffering and dying each day from this horrible virus has led to people respecting and helping one another to the best of their abilities. No one is alone in this time and so we have banded together as a community to attempt to halt the spread of this virus. Many people have begun to make reusable face masks for those in need of them and are respecting the boundaries of staying 6 feet away from one another. It may be hard to realize, but these actions are a way in which love is being shown. It may seem that showing love is a hard task when you cannot interact with others, however communities have been spending their time with families and reconnecting with relationships they have lost, including with God. It has become a time of self-reflection due to the lack of distractions. Not only is it important to form a relationship with your community, but also with the ones you are most around developing respectful, healthy relationships with those around you will help to have that same attitude towards our earth. Through this time of self-isolation, good has come out of it. There has been a decrease in pollution and conflicts in the world, leading to better water sources and prospering wildlife. This proves to show that even in times of crisis, when people come together the love that binds them together can conquer all else.

As Pope Francis has extensively explained, all caring actions should not come out of duty, but from your heart. Many people show acts of kindness with no reward in return because it is our duty to fix what we destroy, hence saving our common home. However, the greatest reward is the satisfaction that you have done all you could to help other lives. Love has to be seen as the most important in order to be acknowledged as necessary. When one person shows an act of kindness, this creates a rippling effect of others following in the kind acts. God is the creator of all and through his act of kindness we shall try and live in his example. He saved us

and so we shall devote ourselves to caring for our common home. When looking at the movie *The Mission*, one can see how kind actions can go a long way and how the idea of civic and political love is put into action. A group of Jesuits worked to build a society for the natives while simultaneously opening their eyes to God. At the same time, the audience is taken on the path of a man, Mendoza, who repents for his sins and is brought to God by the same people he once harmed. It is fascinating to see how the people which Mendoza once enslaved, are the same people who set him free from the burdens of his sins. Their love overpowered him and made him break down, where he was finally released from the heavy burden of his sins. The inhabitants of this earth can do the same. When one understands that we are all equal, created under the same God, then this will lead one to the realization that we shall all be treated the same. Therefore, treat one another as you would like to be treated. When love is given, love shall be received. One shall not lose hope if what they are looking for does not come naturally or easily. Love is a sophisticated concept and so we shall not expect it to be an easy task to come together to care for our common home; however, it is possible. No matter the differences we share with one another, love shows no boundaries. When we finally put aside our differences, this is when change will occur because there will no longer be any distractions or excuses holding us back from doing what is most important. Pope Francis makes it obvious that change has to occur in order to preserve our home. We were gifted this earth and so the least we can do is sustain it and provide for it just as it sustains and provides for all of its inhabitants. One voice can make a change, but when many come together this strengthens the power behind the voice. Pope Francis is our voice and we shall unite with his to find ourselves first, to in return help others along their own paths.

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