

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

[Mary Kallberg](#)

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When someone thinks of the word “home,” they will probably think of their family living in a very specific location. It may seem strange to think of home in broader terms, but this is precisely what Pope Francis does in his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si' (Praise be to you)*. Pope Francis challenges us to think about the Earth as our common home, the home we share with every other human. Harm to the Earth results in harm to the common home and a violation to the common good. Just as every person desires to have a clean home to live in, so too do they deserve to live on a clean and sustainable Earth. The Pope believes that if we teach one another to love the common good, we will better apply that love to our planet. To love the Earth means to love the other people who share this common home with us. In looking in particular at chapter 6, section 5 of *Laudato Si'*, we will see how the Pope introduces civic and political love. When love is practiced broadly in our cities, it is the glue holding society together; as we pay closer attention to what love looks like in that context, Pope Francis argues, we can grow our civic love to a global level and understand we are all interconnected.

Pope Francis begins this section of his encyclical letter by describing how we all live together in communion, and we are all connected to one another, saying “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). Pope Francis is describing how we are all connected to each other through God, who is Our Father. Not only are we connected with others because we all inhabit the same Earth, but we also are connected because we were all made by God, in his image. We are brothers and sisters with one another, and we are called to put others first. This is wonderfully exemplified in the film *The Mission*. This is a film about Jesuit priests who have the mission to bring Christianity to a tribe of people, the Guaraní, located in northeastern Argentina. One of the main characters in this film is Rodrigo, who is a slave trader in the beginning of this film. He would capture people from the Guaraní. He treated the Guaraní like animals, catching them and then selling them for profit. Eventually, everything turns around for Rodrigo once he meets a Jesuit priest, Father Gabriel. Rodrigo joins *The Mission* to help teach the Guaraní about Christianity, and he himself eventually becomes a Jesuit priest. He goes from completely mistreating the Guaraní to living in communion with them, embracing their customs and traditions. Rodrigo finally recognizes the Guaraní for who they truly are: his family. Although Rodrigo began as an enemy to the Guaraní, he became one with them as he joined *The Mission*. It doesn’t matter that they came from different backgrounds or that they were not family through blood, it just matters that they are family through God, and they are there to be in communion with one another. In this same way, we are called to show love to all other people who cross our paths.

As Pope Francis continues in this encyclical letter, he explains that humans need to be in communion with one another. He 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. 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). The world is something that is constantly changing, which can be both good and bad. Pope Francis is saying that we need to understand how much we need other people. As time goes on, it seems like we see other people less and less. It is so easy to simply pick up a phone and text someone, that we are often missing that face-to-face interaction. When we do get the opportunity to have face-to-face interaction, we are too often distracted by the online world instead of giving others our full and undivided attention.

Pope Francis wants to prevent the diminishment of direct human interaction and to let everyone know we need other people, and this is not a need that can be replaced by phones (although, in the age of this global pandemic, this is what keeps us connected with other people, allowing us to keep social distancing while still communicating). As an exercise science major, I can understand how the general health has gone down while technology has made advancements: both mental and physical. Sedentary behavior becomes easier as we can now do everything from the comfort of our own couches. We no longer have to leave the house to spend time with other people, and we don’t even have to go to the store anymore thanks to online shopping. With obesity rates in America constantly increasing, we must strive to leave the house more, which can benefit both mental and physical health. One good way to boost health overall is to simply take walks outside in nature with friends. This way, we will get the face-to-face interaction, we will get to exercise, and we can enjoy our home given to us by God. In doing so we will learn to value our friends more than before.

Saint Augustine is someone who truly knew how to value friendship and recognized the need for human interaction. When his friend passed away, it took a toll on Saint Augustine's happiness. "Only weeping was pleasant to [him], and that had taken my friend's place as [his] heart's delight" (*Confessions* 4.9; Ruden, 84). We must value our friendship as Saint Augustine does. In today's world, we are learning how to value human interaction more than ever before. With the pandemic going on, many feel more alone than ever, needing to quarantine in their own homes. People have been at home constantly, only leaving their houses to do simple things like take the dog for a walk or going to the grocery store. No one can see their friends, coworkers, or peers right now, which is helping us to value human interaction and connection.

Strong connections with other people are completely necessary in making any change to help the world. In Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, Dante had a strong connection with his guide, Virgil. Only because of this connection was Dante able to go through, understand, and fully experience the Inferno and Purgatorio. Only because of this guide is Dante able to go the gates of heaven where God is. Virgil acted as Dante's guide and we must also act as guides to one another. We need to lift each other up and recognize the responsibility we have to one another, bringing each other closer to God. Actions, whether they are good or bad, have a rippling effect and impact the world, and along with it, every person who inhabits the Earth. Being a science major, it is easy for me to understand how the actions of many have negatively impacted the Earth, but also how the actions of many can improve the Earth. For this reason, Pope Francis believes it is necessary to come together as a human race to help the environment.

How can we come together as a human race? How can we improve the way we are treating other people and how can we form a strong connection with others? Pope Francis brings in a practice that Saint Therese taught. We should love in everything we do and put loving other

people before all other things. Pope Francis says, “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). Throughout this section of the encyclical letter, Pope Francis is describing how necessary love is, and here, he describes how we should love others. Showing love is often overlooked, but it is necessary to create a sustainable society. Jesus said, “A new command I give you: Love on another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). What’s amazing about Saint Therese of Lisieux’s way of loving is that it is so simple, yet extremely effective. It is easy to know that today’s world needs more love. Like Pope Francis mentioned there is a lot of sinning and violence. By loving the way St. Therese says to, love will be spread throughout the world little by little, and the love will add up. In Dante’s *The Divine Comedy*, those who were closest to God in the afterlife were those who showed the most love in their lifetimes, and these saints are who we should model our lives after. Even loving in simple ways can bring someone closer to God.

Loving others is something important in everyday life, but it is also extremely important in the political sense. Pope Francis says, “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). Love is something that can bring people in a society together. Colossians 3:14 says "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." This means love is the most important thing and must be placed above everything else. If love is put first, everything else will fall into place. In this part of *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis refers to something called social love. It means that we must show love towards society in the political sense in order to make the best decisions to help our society to thrive. Political and social love go back to what Saint Therese of Lisieux called us to do. She wants us to love in everything we do, and this includes politics. The reason we have politics is to make rules and to lead people of a society. If our leaders do not show love to us in making decisions, what is the point? It is important that love and care of the people in a society comes first in order to best lead a society and make it functional. In *The Mission* the Jesuit priests were leading the Guaraní, teaching them about Christianity. Above all they put love first. Love is what motivated Father Gabriel and Father Rodrigo and kept them going. Love is what gave these Jesuits the strength to remain with the Guaraní and defend them when the Portuguese and Spanish forces attacked. They had the option to run away from The Mission, but they chose to stay with the Guaraní in solidarity to defend them because they put love above all else. This shows how important love is in the political

sense. A leader needs to love the people in his or her society in order to best lead and to truly be in solidarity with the society.

There are countless other ways to help a society even if someone is not a leader. Each way goes back to loving and caring about the society. Pope Francis speaks about the different actions people take show love towards their societies: “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). One thing Pope Francis focuses on in this encyclical letter is preservation. Preservation is important in both the natural sense and in preserving things created by humans themselves. This idea ties back to earlier in *Laudato Si’*, when Pope Francis stated, “together with the patrimony of nature, there is also an historic, artistic and cultural patrimony which is likewise under threat” (see *Laudato Si’* paragraph 143). In preserving nature as well as physical objects, culture is also preserved. Culture is what separates societies from one another. It is what makes them unique, and we should celebrate these differences. A big way to do this is to preserve what we have in this world and recognize

value in things which set societies apart from one another. By protecting certain items such as monuments, everyone gets to benefit from the protections of these landmarks because it remains something people can be proud of. Monuments and landmarks bring societies together so they can relish in the beauty of their own homes. We must learn to love and appreciate the things we have and the things that represent history to us. Take the colosseum, for example. It was something built for gladiator games, and even though it is not used for that purpose anymore, it is still incredibly meaningful to the people who live in Rome. It represents nearly 2000 years of history, and people travel from all over the world to see it. This is something that holds the city of Rome together and sets them apart from other societies around the world. Loving landmarks and monuments is significant in showing love for culture and being proud of who you are and where you came from.

In this section of the Encyclical Letter, Pope Francis centers around the idea of love and how important it is in stitching together the fabric that makes society. Agape is the love between God and his people. This love is powerful and can be spread to other people. According to C.S. Lewis, “by receiving and responding to Agape from [God], we [become] able to exercise Agape towards others.” Being loved by God gives us the power to love other and to love in the political sense as well. This goes back to what Pope Benedict XVI said in his encyclical letter, *Caritas in Veritate*, when he explains how love must be expanded to a larger scale to be applied to “social, economic and political” scenarios in order to make a society thrive. Love must always be at the forefront of our minds in order to make a sustainable world. The Beatles’ song, “All You Need is Love” is a classic song that has stood the test of time, and that is because it is very accurate. Although it seems like a light-hearted catchy song to listen to, it is much more meaningful than it may seem. Everything we do should be done out of love. We must love all the people around us,



as they are our brothers and sisters through our Lord, and they share this common home with us.

In loving them, we will show more love for the world we live in and more love for our cultures and societies.

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