

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

Sabrina LiVolsi

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In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*: On Care for our Common Home, Pope Francis discusses civic and political love and how it pertains to the broader discussion of care for our common home, the Earth. He describes love, mutual care, society, our enemies, our actions, and God, and how they all tie together to form a beautiful idealization of life. We can apply Pope Francis's messages to many aspects of our day to day life, but recently considerable connections can be made. The world, our common home, is united in the fight against the Coronavirus pandemic, but on an individual level we have never been more isolated. We, as members of society and children of God, can use Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* as a model of how we can come together and care for our common home by expressing civic and political love.

Civic love can be described as "love for society and commitment to the common good". Pope Francis believes that this love can unify and encourage people to promote a culture of care. The issue that I personally find is that there is always going to be outliers, opposers, and enemies. To this notion Pope Francis reminds us that we need one another, to love our enemies, and focus on the small gestures of love instead of focusing on what we can't control. Political love on the other hand, is based off of community actions that promote the common good. Pope Francis makes it clear that political life, while not for everyone directly, is something that we can all participate in even at a small level. Something as little as coming together to protect or beautify a public place in a small town, causes a chain reaction that leads to political

and social love. An old Disney Channel song, *Send it On*, talks about the chain reaction of small gestures. One of the lyrics states, “Just one hand can heal another, be apart, reach a heart, just one spark starts a fire,” and even though the song was released over a decade ago, it is still applicable.

We see examples of love and the city in many parts of our life, including literature. *The Divine Comedy*, written by Dante Alighieri and translated by John Ciardi, is a narrative poem that follows Dante’s journey from the darkness of hell to the light of heaven, and everything in between. Broken into three sections- Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso- Dante creates cities in each “place”, from which we can analyze his views on love and how they correspond to each city. If we apply the definition of a city by Augustine’s *City of God* book 19.21 as an “assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by their objects of love” we can compare Dis, the gates of Purgatory, the Earthly Garden, and the Mystic Rose. The first city that Dante creates is Dis, which is the Capital of Hell, and also known as Lower Hell. Described as an Iron city with flaming red watch towers, moats, a guarded entrance, and high walls that separate the city from Upper Hell and surrounds the sixth through the ninth circles of Hell. Dis is also home to the fires of Hell, which are eternal. God created Hell as a punishment out of his love for us. Through the inferno Dante sees a severity in this punishment and torment, but it is necessary. Those who have sinned live out their days in Hell and “only as man surrenders himself to Divine Love may he hope for salvation, and salvation is open to all who will surrender themselves,” (*Inferno* III - notes 7-8). The Divine Love mentioned is the love that belongs to God. This love can also be defined as Agape; the unconditional love of God. Dante then enters the city of the Gates of Purgatory. In the Purgatorio we also come across different types of loves, some of which are

unconventional. Purgatory is divided into three categories that is broken down into seven levels. The three categories are all centered around love. First is bad love, then too little love, and the last with immoderate love. Virgil, Dante's guide, differentiates between natural love and animal or mind-directed love. He says that natural love can never fail, but mind-directed love has the ability to turn evil. When he mentions natural love, he is referring to that of God and directing your love to God will not fail you. Virgil also mentions that love is at the route of all our choices, "Thus you may understand that love alone is the true seed of every merit in you, and of all acts for which you must atone," (*Purgatorio* XVII 103-105). We next see an example of love in the city, at the Earthly Garden, where we see symbols of divine love in the character of Beatrice. The final city where we see examples of love is the Mystic Rose. Ending his journey, the only thing Dante knows for sure is what is engraved on his soul, and that is the truth that he will return to be one with God's Love. We see throughout Dante's story, that each city has its own unique adaptation of love. That concept is important to recognize, that no two loves are going to express themselves in the same manor. If someone is under the impression that love is universally the same, it will lead them to comparison or thoughts of inequality.

The movie *The Mission* provides us with great insight on the fundamentals of Christian faith. The Christian understanding of love, as it relates to sin is that God is Love. And God loves us even in spite of our failures and sins. To love does not mean that the sins are okay, but rather they are forgivable in the eyes of God. When Christians repent, like the character Rodrigo did, they are given full forgiveness of their sins because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis mentions loving your enemies. That notion is applied in

the movie *The Mission*, when Rodrigo was freed from the imprisonment from his own sins when the Guarini, the native tribe that was Rodrigo enslaved in the past, showed him mercy. Pope Francis also mentions in *Laudato Si'*, an example of faith when he says that we are inspired, "...to love and accept the wind, the sun and the clouds, even though we cannot control them,"(Page 147, Paragraph 228). Faith is having complete trust and belief, without knowing the outcome. In *the Mission* Rodrigo has faith in the process of having his sins forgiven. In *Laudato Si'* , Pope Francis tells us to have faith in each other and God's love. We must also have faith in God himself and in his plan for us and the rest of the world.

C.S. Lewis, an author from the early 1900s, wrote about four different types of love. Eros (romantic love) , Philia (friendship love), Storge(family love), and Agape (the love of God). All four loves are applicable to the discussion of Civic and Political love in Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, however I find Agape to be of utmost importance. Agape is defined as the highest form of love and charity, and the love of God for man and of man for God. C.S Lewis said, "Love in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people,"(CSLewisInstitute.org). We see this love today in the Catholic Church as they come up with creative ideas to keep religion and Christ in our lives during this challenging time. This Easter my priest had drove around in the back of a pickup truck, with speakers, and made stops around our entire town to give everyone their Easter blessing and a small sense of normalcy. Even though we were socially distanced, I could see the tears in my priest's eyes as he waved goodbye to his loyal members of the parish. It is important for Christians to recognize, now

more than ever, that even though the building that is home to the Church is closed, it does not mean that communication lines to God and His love for us, are out of business

We live in a society that is so fast paced that we forget about the things that are of greatest importance. We focus on materialistic things and status, popularity, academic and athletic success, amongst many other things. With the world at a temporary halt, we can sit back and take a look at how we were previously living our lives. Being forced to live the simple life, our eyes are open to what is actually essential for us to survive; our health, food, and sleep. This lockdown gives us time to reflect and think of how we can become better members of society when we reenter it. Pope Francis says , "Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion,"(Page 147, Paragraph 228). Since the lockdown, air pollution has gone down immensely. If we use this time apart as a restart, we can make smarter lifestyle choices when we return to society.

Through social media and news channels we here so much negativity. The United States is divided on mostly every topic and issue that can be possibly argued. We are divided by political parties, and our strong opinions. Either we never get the full story, we get a false story, or we get a story that we don't agree with. I was told as a child to never talk about religion or politics publicly in order to ensure that everyone feels comfortable. Yet now it seems that there are not many topics to talk about at all, since everyone is strongly opinionated. Pope Francis reminds us that we need each other and that we have a shared responsibility to do good for our common home. He states, "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,"(Page 148, Paragraph 229). In order to

thrive as a community and as inhabitants of our common home, our differences need to be pushed aside. If there is only one thing that we can agree on, it should be to take care of our common home that God provided us with and take care of each other.

During this pandemic, the world is turning their eyes to those on the frontlines of this invisible enemy. Doctors, nurses, and other healthcare workers are now being recognized as heroes by the entire world population. As a nursing student during this time I am inspired by those in my future profession, but I also feel understandably helpless. To me, choosing to study nursing wasn't a random pick, but rather a vocation and a calling. The desire inside of me to help others while they are vulnerable, sick, or in pain has always been a strong and indescribable feeling. Therefore, to hear and see the terrific stories of the fearless nurses on the frontlines, while I am quarantined and safe in my home, gives me a sense of false pride. The notion for care is extremely applicable in my future possession of nursing. As a nurse we provide the same care to everyone no matter who they are or what they've done. Race, gender, sexual identity, social status, criminal history, occupation, religion, or any other factor does not change the care you receive. As a nurse who happens to be Catholic, I may encounter having to be present for an abortion, or another controversial procedure, but my views must be pushed aside for the sake of my patients. Patient care is the core of the nurse and with care comes great love. Pope Francis mentions, "...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 us,"(Page 148, Paragraph 232). This quote reminds me of the summer reading I was required to do before the start of my freshman year of college. The book was *Stories from the Shadows: Reflections of a Street Doctor* by James J. O'Connell, M.D and it was a

collection of stories and essays about his care for the homeless in Boston. I even got to hear him talk about his experiences in person. A main point that made was the first thing he did to his patients, who were picked up from the streets, was wash their feet. He did this as a sign of service and respect and inverts the usual power structure that someone in the medical field is “above” their patient in anyway. This is how I intend to care for all of my future patients, by spreading love and providing extraordinary care to everyone.

[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*

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