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In a world where its inhabitants have lost sight of their innate duty to their home, the residents are blinded by their own consumption. Bound to themselves and only themselves, a selfish and unkind atmosphere arises through the people's continued practice of self-focus and blatant disregard of both their environment and social settings. Injustice, inequality, and dishonesty are only a few of the qualities that have become more established within the world because of this. However, the collective state of mind that this world's residents retain still possess the ability to change. By establishing feelings of devotion within our hearts and committing ourselves to the greater good for our societies, we can live amongst nature and with ourselves in communion through a universal fraternity. Pope Francis speaks of how this idea can revive our communities and sanctify our minds in the flowing section of *Laudato Si'*.

[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.]

The vision imagined here views that we have the innate ability to care for our environment and social setting. This inborn quality does not require reason for it to function, it requires love. Through the participation of community care, whether it be cleaning up litter, attending a community event such as a fair or parade, or volunteering time at a food pantry or

animal shelter, the participant is expressing a love that affects everyone in a beneficial way. Many people can continue to engage in this type of care naturally such as following the agreed upon laws of their land, limiting their use of natural resources such as water and electricity, and by treating people kindly and equally. As these actions are performed more often throughout the participant's life, a stronger foundation of love can be maintained and utilized within the community. The Catholic Church seeks to inspire its followers to love this way as such Jesus has. By devoting attention to what you could do for your community rather than what your community could do for you, the idea of fraternal care can be passed along to other members within the society as the common goal of the community is further reinforced.

We and nature share the same creator, so it is only justified that we treat one another like family. In accordance with Augustine, it is through this proper treatment that we acknowledge our previous wrongdoings towards the environment in that we adopt a suitable lifestyle approved by the Christian faith. There will always be times where we do not cooperate blissfully and resent the other for a small-time interval, but it is of utmost importance that we join back together so neither family member is treated unfairly. Those who have separated from this communal relationship may be a contributor to the cause of the many strifes nature faces: pollution, climate change, poor water quality, loss of biodiversity, and the breakdown of human interactions (*Laudato Si'*, 17-52). The people who have "departed" from this family may believe that they are above the universe's standards and that there is no benefit to themselves in treating their world kindly. Their actions are folly since it is the surrounding community that feels the effects. Rather than seeking God, the "departed" individuals instead seek only self-benefit in what God has created (*Confessions* 1:31; Ruden, 33). Though we were created in the image of God (New Oxford Annotated Version, Genesis 1:27), we cannot properly appreciate his entirety

if we have turned away from our sibling: nature. To me, a family is a group that has always been there for one another because of the love they have for each other. This family relationship between God, nature, and humans will cease to exist if there is no love expressed between its members.

The extent of our actions is what propels the world into its next stage. While small contributions, both for the good and worse, do accumulate to exert an effect on the world, such as the gradual filling of a landfill or through the sum collection of donations throughout the day, more meaningful actions are preformed with a deeper goal in mind. Pope Francis claims that superficial ideas are not working anymore, for only when we retain meaning and purpose within our daily lives is when beneficial change can be brought about to our communities. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* is one example which explores the consequence of one's actions. Those who have chosen a way of life whose actions prove detrimental to the world around them have experienced suffering equal to their decisions. Those who have committed greater sins such as Ulysses and his deception have experienced greater torment than those who commit sins of lust (*Inferno*, 26.56-57). Those who have instead acted for the community and for the benefit of thy neighbor have been rewarded by joining God's grace. How we act will affect not only our futures within this world, but the future of others as well.

By engaging in individual care for our home, we are simultaneously caring for our neighbors. As we all inhabit God's creation together, it is only right that we respect both God and our neighbors, whether they are of the same species or not, by treating the world as equal. By practicing mindful manners towards others throughout our lives, we can live peacefully and coexist as we enjoy one another's company. Just as we have the right to live, the ecosystem and our social environment have the right to thrive as well. Our actions should not inhibit the

grow of these communities but should seek to enhance their quality so everyone can bask in a unified and connected lifestyle. To dismiss the thought that we should treat nature equally can cause inequality to arise towards different beings. If our home, the very foundation that supports our existence, is viewed unworthy of equal treatment in the eyes of one, it can then be said that this being disregards the effect they have on others. To prevent this ideology from developing, one must be reminded of what our world gave to us and what it continues to give. This includes the warmth of the sun, the cool temperatures shade offers, the water that makes up our sweet drinks, the oxygen within the air, the seeds that bear fruit to consume, the songs that birds sing throughout the day, and the materials that create our houses. Natural historian David Attenborough would agree that the Earth gives us beautiful experiences as well through the diverse uniqueness of organisms colonizing the seven continents. While the earth gives much to supply our existence, we must also give back to ensure it lives on with us. Though our contributions may vary, they all support the upkeep of our world. Much like a house, the residents may undertake various tasks so that everyone is benefited, where one washes the clothes, the other makes the meals, and another cleans the floors. By failing to participate in one of these tasks, the residents become uncared for while they take care of you along with the rest of the house. We must all care for our world in some way if we are to care for each other.

We come closer to fitting God's ideal image of us through the love we express. We are made in the image of God (New Oxford Annotated Version, Genesis 1:27) to be loving and forgiving creatures, so how we act and respond towards the world should aspire to mimic the mindset of Jesus. It is through the truth that we recognize and act accordingly to the changing world around us, rather than rejecting that this occurrence is happening. And there are those who still actively reject these proven facts. By acting on these truths, we seek to restore peace in order

to care properly for our common home. From this, we can come that much closer to what Augustine calls the highest good: God. Pope Francis sees that we can reach this good through the devotion we give to our communities and environments. The web we weave in the process connects us with those who seek the same good and may inspire others to join the purpose. The unity we create through the equal treatment of the planet will not just bring us closer together, but closer to God as well.

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