

Letter from Bishop Larry Duffy to the People of God in the Diocese of Clogher for the Season of Creation, 1st September- 4th October. 2020

Part I

On the 1st September, we celebrated the World Day of Prayer for Creation which marks the beginning of the Season of Creation. This wonderful season runs until the feast of St. Francis of Assisi on October 4th. As you may remember, five years ago, Pope Francis published a groundbreaking letter called *Laudato Si'*. It was addressed to *all people of good will* and that includes you and me. He requested an “*urgent dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet*”, adding that *we need a conversation which includes everyone, because challenge we are facing affect us all.* (see LS, 14).

Since then a lot has happened in our world. There have been many more severe weather events causing death, destruction and displacement of peoples. We are repeatedly seeing many consequences of global warming which results in loss of life and threatens many different species of animal and insect life, the marines and their ecosystems.

Today, our world continues to be deeply affected by the Coronavirus pandemic which has much in common with the environmental crisis. Many experts tell us that this pandemic is a symptom of a much wider ecological crisis. It has certainly shown us how deeply connected everything is, how vulnerable we are as human beings and how fragile is our world. A small invisible virus has stopped the world, forced us to go into lockdown. As we celebrate the Season of Creation this year, we are asked to stop and think about the type of world we want to return to when this crisis has passed. As a human family, we cannot be healthy if the planet is not healthy.

To celebrate the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'* and to highlight the urgency of the ecological crisis, Pope Francis has designated this year a special *Laudato Si'* Anniversary Year until May 2021. He has done this to remind all Catholics of the urgent need to take action in order to protect our common home. I would like to invite you during the upcoming Season of Creation to think about how we might better take care of our common home-and how we might join with others to protect life and the Earth that God has created and has given us to care for.

The Coronavirus pandemic shows just how interrelated we are and how much we depend on each other. It has also highlighted how dependent we are on the earth for our survival. The pandemic is also a call for us to reflect; an opportunity for us all to judge ourselves, to judge what we are doing and how we might have been contributing to the problem by our lifestyles. And the problem is wider than simply the ecological dimension – it is also a social one. We must integrate questions of social justice into debates on the environment. Questions such as human rights abuses, the religious intolerance, discrimination, racism, the attacks on the life of the unborn and the denial of right to life – these are all part of what Pope Francis calls ‘colonizing interests’ and ‘the throw-away culture’ underpinning our neglect of creation and the creator. In responding to this invitation to judge, we are called to be like the good Samaritan; to show solidarity with the earth and all its people, to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor and the wounded, to love our neighbour.

Part II

In *Laudato Si'* we read that Christians need 'an 'ecological conversion'..., that 'living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.' (LS, 217).

Since the publication of the Pope's letter five years ago many young people have taken on the challenge of caring for our earth and our environment. The young Swedish student, Greta Thunberg, only sixteen years old, has led the way. She started out as one person, and last year 7 million young people joined her in global solidarity. Young people have been urging us to reflect on these questions surrounding care of creation, highlighting the cry of the earth, the cry of the poor and wounded.

So what can we do? The theme for this year's Season of Creation in Ireland is "**Cultivating Hope**". Hope is found in action and each of us can do something. We can take action to protect our bio-diversity, the birds and insects. During lockdown many people remarked on noticing the beauty of nature more, the birdsong, the trees, the wildlife. This is what happens when we slow down. We need to reconnect with nature and rekindle that sense of awe and wonder with creation – the presence of God. We are being invited to fall in love again with God's Creation, like St. Francis, to see nature as part of our family.

Each week during this season, and beyond, we can also try to do small actions such as walking or cycling more, watching our energy use, sorting out our recycling, really thinking about how we use the resources of this planet. Our parishes should begin to look at how we can become more sustainable, more eco-friendly. I invite people to read *Laudato Si'* during this season of creation and ask others to join you. I invite each parish to plant a native Irish tree during this Season of Creation, set up a *Laudato Si'* reading group / a care for creation group in light of this special anniversary year for *Laudato Si'*.

This crisis is also linked to the spiritual life of our parishes. We need to rediscover a sense of reverence for God, for the earth and for our brothers and sisters who are excluded and treated like second class citizens -at home or away from home, born and unborn. We share this responsibility with the whole Church. We owe it to generations yet unborn to work together to sustain life on this planet, to protect God's creation, our common home.

At Diocesan level, we have a **Clogher Justice and Peace & Integrity of Creation Group** which does great work in this area. The group would welcome additional members. If you are interested in joining and playing a part at that level, please contact the secretary, Anne Molloy on amolloy164@live.co.uk

This is urgent. I urge you to act now and to pray. May our fragility, as shown by the pandemic, be our hope. Let us all use this time wisely; to pray and to act; to examine our consciences about the lifestyles we have; to choose simplicity of living as a route back to wonder and awe in God's presence and, moreover, to show solidarity with our fellow beings and with creation through our compassion and actions. Everything is connected.

This is our time. As Pope Francis puts it:

“Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.” (LS, 207)

**+ Larry Duffy
Bishop of Clogher**