CARING FOR GOD’S CREATION: Living Laudato Si

Helping to bring Pope Francis’s encyclical to life in our community

From the Diocese of Syracuse “Care for Our Common Home” Task Force

Carry Christmas Throughout the Year

By Doug Anderson

Contributing Writer

*“For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation.” Laudato Si’ (§235 )*

Advent, Christ’s “coming,” begins not only the Church year, but also includes God’s plan for our fragile, vulnerable planet. In Jesus, God gave us in human form an understanding of God’s vulnerability. Later, his ministry revealed all we should do, be and become to carry Christmas throughout the year. Jesus lived to heal us and our fragile relationships. This includes our relationship to the earth as our home and to its fragile eco-systems that sustain our daily lives.

The celebration of Christmas is one of warm and heartfelt celebrations. The more difficult challenge of Christmas is to embrace it as a lifetime commitment to live as Jesus did. His was a life of humility, honesty, truth, questioning authorities, building community, and creating a larger vision, both for us and our world. To truly “live” Pope Francis’s encyclical, Laudato Si, means to praise God through our care for others, our work for justice for marginalized peoples and our efforts to care for this beautiful planet that sustains us.

The Laudato Si Action platform is a collaboration between the Vatican, an international coalition of Catholic organizations and “all men and women of goodwill.” It is rooted in the strengths and realities of communities around the world, empowering all to take “decisive action, here and now” as we journey towards a better future together (LS 161). Goal # 7, **Community Engagement and Participatory Action**, emphasizes community involvement and participatory action to care for all of creation. In 2015, some 150 nations, including the U.S., adopted the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a universal action call to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity. <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> Parishes can use SDG and Laudato Si Action Platform goals as guidelines to educate about environmental issues and to discern future community involvement. SDG Goal # 1 calls **for No Poverty.** According to 2020 US Census data, the poverty rate in Syracuse was 30.3%, 32.7 % in Binghamton and 27.4 % in Utica. Addressing rural as well as urban poverty in our local communities is especially important now as years of progress against poverty have been erased by Covid 19 and inflation.

If God gave God’s “best” at Christmas, what “best” do we give our world to help heal it? Advent and the birth of Jesus call us to think more about the Saint Nicholas tradition of thoughtful gift-giving rather than gift-getting from Santa Claus. By committing just 25 percent of our gift-giving budget to people in need or to organizations that heal our world, we can make a difference. We can also commit our time and skills to local committees and organizations that change public policies, help vulnerable people and our vulnerable earth. For example**, Eastern Farmworkers**, a volunteer-run organization involved with low-income working families, farm workers and their families, offers many ways to engage with their efforts.

In 1990, Sydney L. Donahoe wrote *Earth Keeping: Making it a Family Habit,* a family guide to earth stewardship, including suggestions for our homes, yards, and cars. Embracing a lifestyle of “earth-keeping” can fill us with hope. The birth of Jesus is God’s gift of hope and calls us to reflect upon what vision of life we will choose. Christmas can be celebrated every day of the year, starting with a holy season that embarks on making God’s vision of hope a reality by our actions of caring for our common home.

 *Our column next month will focus on “The Letter,” the movie based on Pope Francis’s Laudato Si encyclical.*