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Pope Francis on Saint Francis

I do not want to write this encyclical without turning to that attractive and compelling figure, whose name I took as my guide and inspiration when I was elected Bishop of Rome.

I believe that St Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. He is the patron saint of all who study and work in the area of ecology, and he is also much loved by non-Christians. He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast.

He loved, and was deeply loved for his joy, his generous self-giving, his openheartedness. He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself.

He showed us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace ...

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology ... takes us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. He communed with all creation, even preaching to the flowers, inviting them "to praise the Lord, just as if they were endowed with reason." ... To him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists ...

If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously.

The poverty and austerity of St Francis were ... a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

What is more, St Francis, faithful to scripture, invites us to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness ... For this reason, Francis asked that part of the friary garden always be left untouched, so that wild flowers and herbs could grow there, and those who saw them could raise their minds to God, the creator of such beauty. Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise. ■





Canticle of the Sun

St Francis of Assisi

Most high, all powerful, all good Lord!
All praise is Yours, all glory, honor, and all blessing.

To You, alone, Most High, do they belong.
No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

Be praised, my Lord, through all Your creatures,
especially through my lord Brother Sun,
who brings the day; and You give light through him.
And he is beautiful and radiant in all his splendor!
Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the Stars;
in the heavens You have made them bright, precious and beautiful.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air,
and Clouds and Storms, and all the weather,
through which You give Your creatures sustenance.

Be praised, my Lord, through Sister Water;
she is very useful, and humble, and precious, and pure.

Be praised, my Lord, through Brother Fire,
through whom You brighten the night.
He is beautiful and cheerful, and powerful and strong.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Mother Earth,
who feeds us and governs us,
and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Be praised, my Lord, through those who forgive for love of You;
and who endure sickness and trials.

Blessed those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Be praised, my Lord, through our sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
Happy those she finds doing Your most holy will.
The second death can do no harm to them.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks,
and serve Him with great humility.