

## READ REFLECT AND REVIEW

### SESSION 4

### LETTERS, ENCYCLICALS AND LIVES OF SAINTS

#### *LAUDATO SI (PRAISE BE TO YOU MY LORD)*

#### READ

LAUDATO SI<sup>1</sup> IS AN ENCYCLICAL OF POPE FRANCIS PUBLISHED IN MAY 2015. IT FOCUSES ON CARE FOR THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT AND ALL PEOPLE, AS WELL AS BOARDER QUESTIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD, HUMANS, AND THE EARTH. THE ENCYCLICAL'S SUBTITLE 'CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME' REINFORCES THESE KEY THEMES.

POPE FRANCIS' ECOLOGICAL ENCYCLICAL CALLS FOR GLOBALLY COORDINATED STATE ACTION TO MITIGATE CLIMATE CHANGE. HIS PAPAL ENVIRONMENTALISM IS BOTH TRADITIONAL — ROOTED IN THE TEACHING OF HIS PREDECESSORS, WITH THE TEXT LITTERED WITH CITATIONS TO BENEDICT XVI AND JOHN PAUL II — AND RADICAL, TAKING ITS STARTING POINT FROM THE GOSPEL EMPHASIS ON THE POOR AS PREFERENTIAL SUBJECTS OF GOD'S LOVE.

FRANCIS' ENCYCLICAL WAS HIGHLY ANTICIPATED — BY THE UN, BY THE NOBEL COMMITTEES, BY ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISTS THE WORLD OVER . MANY SEE THE POPE IN THE IMAGE OF ST. FRANCIS, A MAN WHO SOUGHT TO LOOK AT THE WORLD AS JESUS DID, AS A POOR MAN AT HOME WITH THE POOR.

POPE FRANCIS LARGELY ACCEPTS THAT THE CLIMATE IS GETTING WARMER DUE TO HUMAN ACTIVITY. "UNFORTUNATELY, MANY EFFORTS TO FINDS SOLUTIONS TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS ARE OFTEN FRUSTRATED NOT ONLY BY THE REFUSALS OF THE POWERFUL, BUT ALSO THE LACK OF INTEREST BY OTHERS," THE TEXT READS.

THE TEXT COVERS EVERYTHING FROM POLLUTION AND PARKS TO TECHNOLOGY AND ARCHITECTURE. THE ENVIRONMENT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD ABOVE ALL IN TERMS OF THE "INTIMATE RELATION BETWEEN THE POOR AND THE FRAGILITY OF THE PLANET" AND "THE CONVICTION THAT THE WHOLE WORLD IS INTIMATELY CONNECTED. SINCE THE BEGINNING OF HIS PONTIFICATE FRANCIS HAS DENOUNCED WHAT HE CALLS A "THROWAWAY CULTURE" WHERE THE POOR, THE ELDERLY, THE UNBORN, THE UNEMPLOYED, THE MIGRANT AND THE DISABLED ARE CAST TO THE MARGINS. HERE HE DEVELOPS THE ARGUMENT THAT AN ECONOMIC STRUCTURE BUILT ON CONVENIENCE AND DISPOSABILITY TREATS INCONVENIENT PEOPLE AS DISPOSABLE; THE TEXT THEREFORE DENOUNCES BOTH ABORTION AND THE POPULATION CONTROL PROGRAMS SO BELOVED BY MANY IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT.

ONE ILLUMINATING EXAMPLE IS THAT OF URBAN LIVING. THE TEXT OBSERVES THAT MANY SPRAWLING CITIES HAVE BECOME NEARLY UNLIVEABLE AS THEY LITERALLY CHOKE ON POLLUTION. THE POOR ARE OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM GREEN SPACES, WHICH HAVE BEEN PRIVATIZED BY THE WEALTHY. THAT'S A DIFFERENT WAY TO THINK ABOUT THE HARMONY BETWEEN NATURE AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS AND

LEADS TO SURPRISING CONCLUSIONS. FOR EXAMPLE, THE POOR IN THE WORLD'S FINANCIAL CENTRES, NEW YORK, AND LONDON, HAVE READY ACCESS TO VAST PARKS ON AN EQUAL BASIS WITH THE RICH, WHILE IN BEIJING THE RICH PAY TO BREATHE DIFFERENT AIR THAN THE POOR DO.

FRANCIS CALLS IT "INTEGRAL ECOLOGY," WHICH IS THE TERM HE USES ALONGSIDE "SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT." IT'S INTEGRATION THAT HE PROPOSES — GOD AND MAN, THE RICH AND THE POOR, THE NATURAL WORLD WITH THE WORLD OF WORK AND INDUSTRY.

*FRANCIS WRITES: 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 SAINT 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 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 SHOWS US JUST HOW INSEPARABLE THE BOND IS BETWEEN CONCERN FOR NATURE, JUSTICE FOR THE POOR, COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY, AND INTERIOR PEACE.*

## REFLECT

WHAT IS IT LIKE FOR YOU REFLECTING ON THE KEY IDEA BEHIND THIS ENCYCLICAL BEING THAT OF INTEGRAL ECOLOGY? IN SUMMARY, THIS IS THAT PEOPLE AND PLANET ARE PART OF ONE FAMILY WHERE THE EARTH IS OUR COMMON HOME. IT INVITES PEOPLE TO PROTECT GOD'S CREATION FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, TO EMBRACE A LIFESTYLE CHANGE FOR THEIR OWN GOOD AND TO TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE POOR AND MORE VULNERABLE. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THIS IDEAL?

## REVIEW

- 1 EARLY ON, POPE FRANCIS POINTS TO ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI, WHO SHOWS HOW "INSEPARABLE THE BOND IS BETWEEN CONCERN FOR NATURE, JUSTICE FOR THE POOR, COMMITMENT TO SOCIETY AND INTERIOR PEACE" (NO. 10)
  - HOW DO WE GRAPPLE WITH THE BIG QUESTIONS RAISED BY POPE FRANCIS?
  - WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR US TO START LIVING THE ANSWERS?