



PASTORAL LETTER FROM THE BISHOP
 appointed to be read
 in all churches and chapels of the Diocese of Portsmouth
 on 7th November 2021, the Thirty-Second Sunday of the Year.

GOD'S CREATION

Friends,

At this time, the COP26 Climate Change Conference is taking place in Glasgow.¹ World leaders and experts are discussing how best to tackle the environmental emergency the world faces. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide them towards a good outcome. Let us also ask the Holy Spirit to change our own attitudes and lifestyles, so that we will be more virtuous stewards of God's creation.

Sadly, much popular discussion about climate change, however welcome, is shallow or functional: the loss of animal habitats, the mess passed on to the grandchildren, melting ice-caps and rising sea levels, the damage caused by extreme weather. Vested interests focus on the climate emergency whilst ignoring the emergency of poverty and inequality, excessive consumption and the throwaway culture.² What is missing here is an important ecological triad: love of God - love of humanity - love of creation. This integral vision - love of God and love of humanity leading to love of creation – should make us as Catholics people of immense ecological passion. We love the Earth because God has made it: the Spirit hovered over the waters.³ He has given it to us so that in Christ we can build a Kingdom of justice, peace and love for all.⁴ This is why ecological concern must be about more than recycling however important. The way we treat the Earth is linked to the way we treat others, and vice versa.⁵

The Church's vision is gloriously comprehensive. God has created this passing world in all its beauty, splendour, diversity and interdependence.⁶ Every creature is a 'sacramental' with its own intrinsic grammar pointing to Him.⁷ There is a hierarchy of creatures, plants and animals, with humanity the summit of His work.⁸ Human beings, made in God's image and likeness, lie at the crossroads between the visible and the invisible, with bodies that come from

the earth and souls that come from above, and God has entrusted the whole world to our care.⁹ He loves this blue planet, so precious and fragile, the third from the Sun, speeding through space at eighteen miles a second: He loves it with a limitless love.¹⁰ To damage it, to squander its resources, to mistreat animals and wreck the climate, to abuse fellow humans or to deprive those less fortunate of what they need, is to commit a grave sin.¹¹

Today, the Earth our sister cries out to us.¹² The way things are going is not right. We need to change, to do our bit. We must hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.¹³ In Christ and in the Holy Spirit, we must seek to resolve the crisis by adopting a simpler, more sustainable way of living, with less consumerism, within a new economic order advantageous to the needy.¹⁴

What can we do? As Catholics, we should work with other environmentalists to promote the care of creation and the integral ecological conversion that is needed. The Church brings to the table a Gospel vision that calls people to love God, to love humanity and thus to love creation. You and I, people of prayer, need to be better formed in that vision, and to model it in our own lives through practical initiatives. Caritas Diocese of Portsmouth has taken a lead here, in the work of persuasion, formation and social action, and already many individuals and families, parishes and schools, are responding keenly. Two weeks ago, our Board of Trustees, reviewing investment policies, committed the Diocese to a five-year decarbonisation project. We are already committed to the Living Wage, to reducing waste and to an environmentally sensitive travel policy. A few of our parishes undertake car-sharing; one is building a wildlife-friendly prayer-garden. Some of our schools have installed ground heat pumps, bio-mass boilers and solar panels with energy-efficient lighting, whilst others host recycling initiatives, environmental events and eco-patches that produce fruit and vegetables for charity or the school kitchen.

But what about you and me? Our Diocese has a ten-year evangelisation strategy called *Bringing People Closer to Jesus Christ through His Church*. The care of creation, living simply and promoting a Catholic ecology, falls under Priority Four “Service to All:” that our parishes and schools become outward-looking communities serving the local poor and needy, with concern for social justice and for the environment. The environmental crisis challenges all of us to a personal conversion, in which our relationship with God becomes evident in our relationship with others and in our relationship with Nature. This begins at home, in local food and lifestyle choices, in our gardens, in our use of water and energy. Please read again the first three Chapters of the Book of Genesis? Why not pray the opening lines of Eucharistic Prayer IV? Besides Fridays, could you keep an extra day meatless? Why not take the train instead of the car? Thinking of the Synod consultation process, is there a way we can better care for creation in our local parish? A good question to ask is this: If your parish closed, would anyone who is not a member care or notice the difference?¹⁵

Let us pray: “We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love.”¹⁶ We make this prayer today Bamenda Sunday, when we pray for our sister Diocese in Cameroon. It’s also November, when we pray for our departed loved ones and focus on heaven, our true home, the new creation. So today, as the natural world around us undergoes the dying process of autumn to begin the long rest of winter, let

us ask the Blessed Mother to obtain the gifts of the Holy Spirit for COP26. May She, Who is our life, our sweetness and our hope, keep our Diocese united with the Sacred Heart of Christ Her Son. And may She help you and me to be better stewards of creation, responsible for the poorest and most vulnerable, creating “a healthier society ... in a world without hunger, poverty, violence and war.”¹⁷

Thank you for listening – and please know that I am praying for you.

In Corde Iesu,
+Philip
Bishop of Portsmouth

¹ For more on COP26, see the official website: <https://ukcop26.org> (November 2021)

² Much of what we say here derives from Pope Francis’s landmark Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si* (London, CTS: 2015). See especially *Laudato Si* 20-61 (‘What is happening to our Common Home’), 101-136 (‘The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis’) and 137-162 (‘Integral Ecology’).

³ See Genesis 1: 1

⁴ See the ‘Preface of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe’ *The Roman Missal* p. 546

⁵ “The book of nature is one and indivisible: it takes in not only the environment but also life, sexuality, marriage, the family, social relations: in a word, integral human development. Our duties towards the environment are linked to our duties towards the human person ... It would be wrong to uphold one set of duties while trampling on the other. Herein lies a grave contradiction in our mentality and practice today: one which demeans the person, disrupts the environment and damages society” Benedict XVI *Caritas in Veritate* (London, CTS: 2008) 51.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 299.

⁷ “The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other. ... The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man’s intellect and will” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 340 and 341

⁸ Genesis 1: 27; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 355f.

⁹ Eucharistic Prayer IV beautifully reprises Genesis 1: 26-31 when it says “You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care (*eique commisisti mundi curam universi*), so that in serving you alone the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures” (*The Roman Missal. English Translation according to the Third Typical Edition* [London, CTS: 2010] 692).

¹⁰ Cf. Jeremiah 31: 3

¹¹ “To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God” *Laudato Si*

¹² Here, Pope Francis is quoting Patriarch Bartholomew.

¹³ *Laudato Si* 1.

¹⁴ “Today .. we have to realise that a true ecological approach *always* becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear *both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*” *Laudato Si* 49.

¹⁵ *Laudato Si* 16; cf. 137ff.

¹⁶ J. Mallon *Divine Renovation Beyond the Parish* (Frederick, Word Among Us: 2020) 35

¹⁷ Eucharistic Prayer IV

¹⁸ Pope Francis *Fratelli Tutti* (London, CTS: 2020) 287