

Make a Stand! Be Heard As a Catholic Community and As Concerned Citizens

Lenten Reflections Within God's Creation



**MALACCA
JOHORE
DIOCESE**

www.mjdiocese.my
f mjdiocese
@ malaccajohoredioocese
caritasmjd.mjdiocese.my
creationjustice.mjdiocese.my



**MJD
50
2022**

www.lenten.mjdiocese.my
f MJD Lenten

Bishop's Message

"Make A Stand! Be Heard!"

This headline "Tiananmen Tank Man: Faced down the Chinese army" flashed throughout the world. A lone figure stood directly in the path of oncoming tanks, near Tiananmen Square in China, on June 6, 1989, the day after China's bloody crackdown on student protesters. No one knew who he was but he became a symbol of resistance. We remember him as the "one who made a stand".

Some day, somewhere or for something, each of us has to make a stand. It can be for oneself or for others or for the voiceless. It may require of us to speak out for what is right or expose injustices or stand unbending for what we believe in.

Why is it important to stand up for something? This act builds self respect, gains respect of and from others and indicates the values we live for. It is witnessing to our belief.

The most renowned example of "biblical heroes who made a stand" are the 3 young men in the Book of Daniel, who were cast into a fiery furnace. They did bow down, nor give in to the King's order to worship another god. They could not be persuaded to do anything contrary to God's will. They witnessed to the one God of the Israelites. The king and the palace were in awe.

Today, every single person, concerned citizens, Catholic and others, catholic communities and nation must make themselves heard on what happens to the poor and the earth. We must be **convicted** to convert; **convert** to cultivate a new way of life; **cultivate** to **commit** ourselves to **care for our common home.**

You who love what God loves, MAKE A STAND:

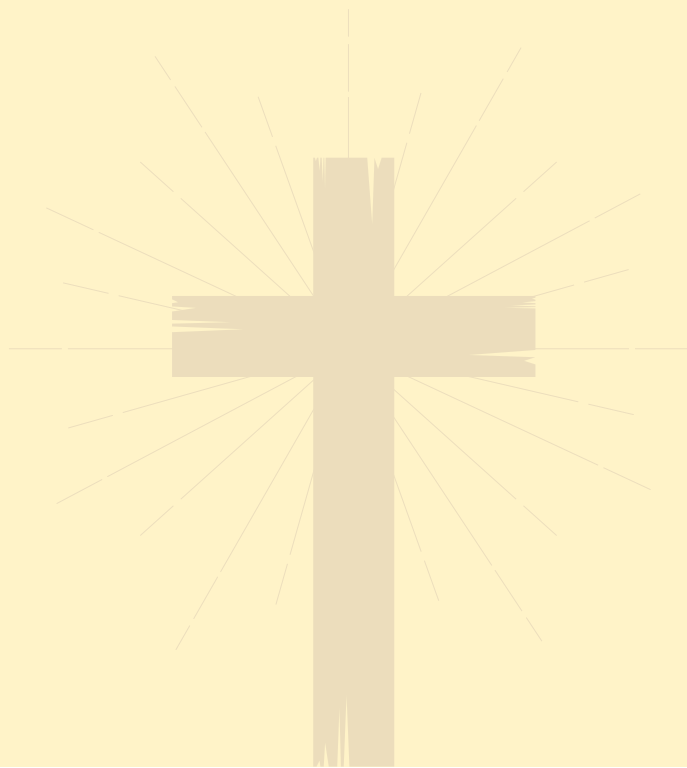
*Make a stand for sustainability via recycling and zero waste;
Make a stand to heal the ravaged earth and sea with the friends of
the earth;*

*Make a stand to report polluters, exploiters and lawbreakers
who damage our common home, our earth.*

The Lord glorifies Himself when we make a stand for Him and His will. We are not alone.

Together Building His Kingdom,
Bishop Bernard Paul

Introduction
to the Malacca
Johore Diocese
Lenten Campaign
2022



“Make a Stand! Be Heard As a Catholic Community and As Concerned Citizens”

After John had been arrested, Jesus went into Galilee. There he proclaimed the Good News from God. The time has come' he said 'and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.'

Mark 1:14 - 15

Lent is a time of repentance. The word repentance is usually associated with turning away from our sins. The Greek word used in Mark 1:15 is *metanoia* (μετάνοια). *Metanoia* is a call to change one's way of life and consciousness. However, one cannot change for the sake of changing. The gospel of Mark calls one to change one's way of life where God is absent, and sin is present by embracing the Good News.

In the Catholic Church, Lent is traditionally a call to conversion. Conversion is an apt term because it encompasses the call of Jesus to repent. Every year, we do this to take stock of ourselves by examining our conscience, accompanying it with prayer, fasting (penance), and almsgiving (acts of charity).

In this Lenten campaign, the Malacca Johore Diocese reiterates the message of Lent following the *Laudato Si'* option, a journey this diocese began in 2020. In 2020, the call was “Listen! The Earth

Cries.” Last year, the message was “Live Simply! That Others Might Simply Live.”

The Malacca Johore Diocese Lenten Campaign for 2022 is:
“Make a Stand! Be Heard As a Catholic Community and As Concerned Citizens”

The direction of the Lenten Campaign 2022 is our follow-up to the *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 encyclical letter of the Holy Father Pope Francis On Care for Our Common Home. The Pope’s letter invites us to a profound interior conversion towards reconciliation with creation. This is by examining “our lives and acknowledging the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act” (#218).

As if echoing the spirit of Lent, Pope Francis tells us that “we need to experience a conversion, or change of heart” (#218). This is by examining whether our way of life, attitudes, and spirituality is in harmony with creation.

In many ways, *Laudato Si'* asks us to develop a creation-centered spirituality as it is in God’s creation that we express our love for God and one another (#84–#88). We can do this by opening our hearts to authentic communion through our “tenderness, compassion and concern for our fellow human beings” (#91). This is while cultivating a way of life that seeks to care for the earth, our common home.

The Lenten Campaign 2022 invites us all to commit ourselves to a world that faithfully reflects the plan of God for all creation.

Let us commit ourselves by making a stand. How do we make a stand?

We can make a stand by choosing to be informed and educate ourselves about what it means to have an attitude that contributes towards a sustainable earth.

We can make a stand by ensuring that our parishes are already *Laudato Si'* parishes. This means everyone learns and makes caring for the earth a habit and a way of life. This is by encouraging and informing one another at the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC), Catechetics, Children, and Youths, etc.

We can make a stand by forming networks and relationships that can support our effort to care for the environment. This can be done by inviting the Creation-Justice ministry to help start the parish effort. Parishes can start their Creation-Justice ministries to ensure the continuation of this direction. This also includes finding out about the recycling centers for districts and areas where they are not readily available. Recycling is a big part of ensuring sustainability. We can even write to our districts to make recycling part of its service.

We can make a stand by having dialogues with other religions that are working towards similar goals. For example, even before Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'*, the Buddhists were already working towards a sustainable earth.

We can make a stand by being present to the realities and situations of our fellow human beings, especially those who are recovering from the effects of the pandemic. We can contribute to the parish efforts for families and people affected deeply by the pandemic.

We can make a stand by ensuring that we are not part of a system that exploits the poor, the migrants, the vulnerable, and the abandoned. This is especially so when we run our business, factory, or are holding positions of authority. We can also help when we care for the migrants around us, treating them as Jesus would and ensuring that they are treated justly. This is especially for those of us with domestic workers in our homes.

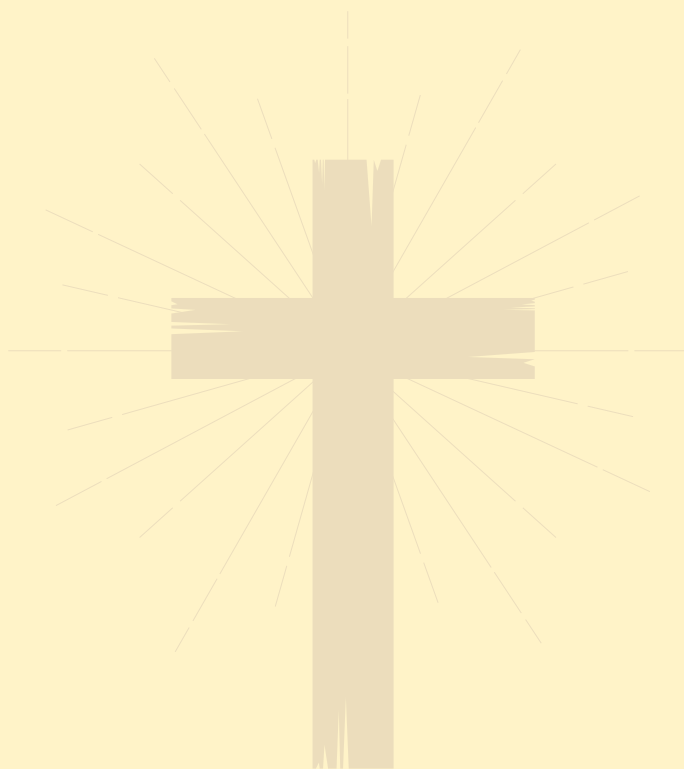
We can make a stand when we are vigilant in ensuring that children are always cared for, taking action when we know they are exploited or abused.

We can make a stand by not being wasteful with precious resources and are not unnecessarily extravagant. For instance, we are not wasteful with food, water, and electricity. We learn to make a habit of recycling plastics and buying fewer plastics. We learn to live with helpful inconveniences, like always having a tote bag for shopping, reusable containers to bring to places we usually order food from, and always carrying our water bottle instead of bottled mineral water. It is also vital that we do not overeat, and eating less meat is always a healthier option.

Let us be heard by our stand as a Catholic Community and as concerned citizens.

LENTEN CAMPAIGN 2022

Parish Level Activity



How do we make a stand as a Parish?

PROPOSAL

We can make a stand by forming networks and relationships that can support our effort to care for the environment. This can be done by inviting the Creation-Justice ministry to help start the parish effort. Parishes can have their *Diocesan Ministry for Creation Justice* to ensure the continuation of this direction.

ACTION

Launch the parish *Creation-Justice Ministry* working with the *Diocesan Ministry for Creation Justice* (<http://creationjustice.mjdiocese.my>).

ACTION

Finding out about the recycling centers for districts and areas where they are not readily available. Recycling is a big part of ensuring sustainability. We can make an effort to write to our districts to make accessible recycling efforts if none is present. Perhaps, find out if the Tzu Chi Foundation is in your area because they are already doing this work.

ADULTS ACTIVITY

Sign the Laudato Si' action platform pledge for your family at:
<https://laudatosiactionplatform.org/pledge-your-commitment/>

CHILDREN ACTIVITIES

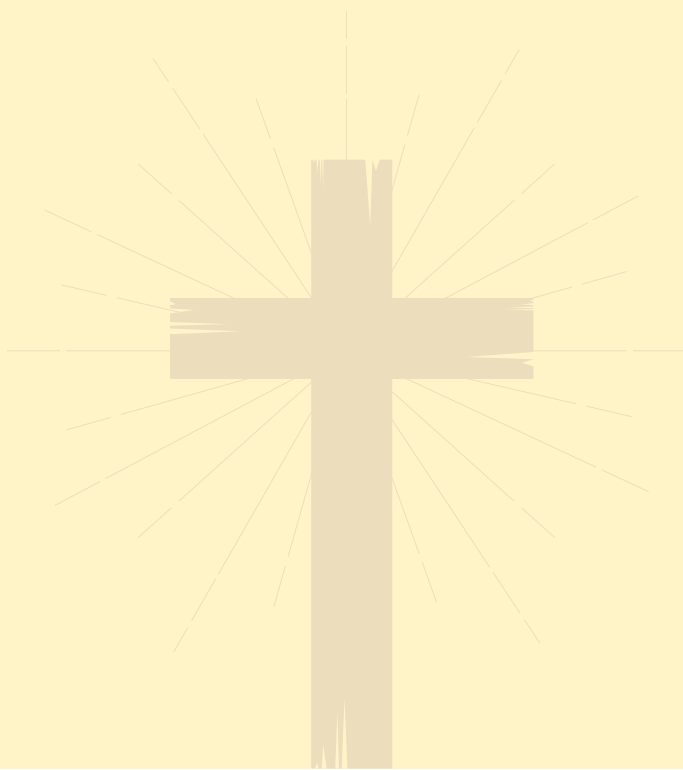
Organize a drawing contest. Suggestion: "How I can care for the Earth?"

YOUTH LEVEL

Take up a recycling project. Can collaborate with Creation-Justice ministries.

THE MALACCA JOHORE DIOCESE
LENTEN CAMPAIGN 2022

Weekly Reflection Guide for Families and BEC



“Make a Stand! Be Heard As a Catholic Community and As Concerned Citizens”

The Lenten Campaign traditionally has a special focus on the poor. However, for the past two years, the Malacca Johor Diocese has embarked on a campaign that embraces creation, focusing on the vulnerable and caring for our common home, earth. Our Lenten reflection is guided by a creation-centered spirituality theme following the spirit of Pope Francis's *Laudato Si'* message for all of us.

I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters. If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn “realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith”.

Laudato Si' #64

PRAYER FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

(to be prayed at the beginning of each week's reflection)

O Lord, in this season of Lent,
We resolve ever more firmly
to examine the state of our consciousness and our way of life.
Grant me the light to see areas in my life that
is an obstruction or brings us away from living
a life that is in union with you.

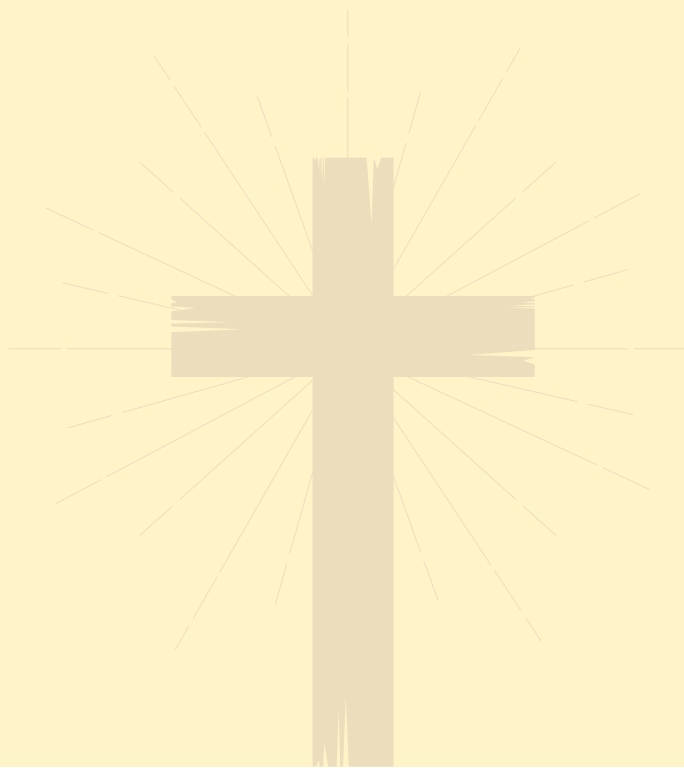
Dear Lord, extend our consciousness
so that our Lenten observance of
prayer, penance, and acts of charity move beyond just ourselves
to a life of harmony with creation.
By this, we mean a way of life rooted in love and communion with
all your creation.
We will also continue to be attentive to the children, poor, elderly,
abandoned, and migrants,
especially the ones around us.

We pledge to cultivate an attitude of praise,
with a spirituality that can embrace
and remain in harmony with creation.
May your grace strengthen our Lenten commitment.

We make this prayer in Jesus's name and in union with Mary,
Queen of all creation. Amen

ASH WEDNESDAY, 2 MARCH 2022

Silence versus Noise



Message of *Laudato Si'*

On the other hand, no one can cultivate a sober and satisfying life without being at peace with him or herself. An adequate understanding of spirituality consists in filling out what we mean by peace, which is much more than the absence of war. Inner peace is closely related to care for ecology and for the common good because, lived out authentically, it is reflected in a balanced lifestyle together with a capacity for wonder which takes us to a deeper understanding of life. Nature is filled with words of love, but how can we listen to them amid constant noise, interminable and nerve-wracking distractions, or the cult of appearances?

Many people today sense a profound imbalance which drives them to frenetic activity and makes them feel busy, in a constant hurry which in turn leads them to ride rough-shod over everything around them. This too affects how they treat the environment.

An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us, whose presence "must not be contrived but found, uncovered".

Laudato Si' #225

Take time to consider, what are the noises and distractions that may cause a certain imbalance in my way of life. Does this imbalance affect in me being in harmony with my loved ones, those around me, and my care of the environment?

GOSPEL – MATTHEW 6:1-6,16-18

Your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you

Jesus said to his disciples: 'Be careful not to parade your good deeds before men to attract their notice; by doing this you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven. So, when you give alms, do not have it trumpeted before you; this is what the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets to win men's admiration. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you give alms, your left hand must not know what your right is doing; your almsgiving must be secret, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'And when you pray, do not imitate the hypocrites: they love to say their prayers standing up in the synagogues and at the street corners for people to see them; I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.

'When you fast do not put on a gloomy look as the hypocrites do: they pull long faces to let men know they are fasting. I tell you solemnly, they have had their reward. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that no one will know you are fasting except your Father who sees all that is done in secret; and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you.'

REFLECTION

Sometimes we forget that a great deal of strength and inspiration can come from a place of silence. We can become too accustomed to “noise.” Noise can mean the need for attention, recognition, acknowledgment, and praise. Noise can also be in the form of needing to be loud in our actions so that people know and can see the good we are doing. Noise can also come in a great need to be entertained. For instance, entertaining ourselves with gossip or being busybodies, or that our television is always on. Noise can refer to many activities, yet they do not nourish us as human persons and as children of God.

In our pursuit from one “noise” to another, the question we can ask ourselves is:

Is God not enough? Is God too poor that we need a great deal of “noise” like the ones Jesus was critical of in the gospel? Or perhaps, we are poor?

Jesus reminds us that there is an aspect of our life where God is present and sees all we do, even in secret. We do not need to parade around our actions and decisions “noisily” because, for us, it is directed towards God. Needing more can indicate that God is not enough. This is something we can reflect on.

Let us cultivate the ground of silence in our spirituality. Silence can create the condition for us to discern the movement of the Spirit better. It can be a great source of strength and inspiration. Cultivating silence also predisposes us towards a direction that is in harmony with God, one another, and creation.

LENTEN EXERCISE

The Lenten exercise of penance such as bodily fasting and self-denial can bring us to the realization that perhaps, we have focused too much on bodily comforts and pleasures. It may have dulled our senses and the voices of our conscience. The exercises of prayer, penance, and charity are meant to strengthen our desire and will in committing to living a life that is in union with God. For this week, let us be aware of the “noises” in our life. This is especially when they are the ones that make us insensitive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

MY STAND

- Acts of Penance: During Lent, let us choose to eat only for sustenance. We can renew our practice of penance instead of it becoming a routine. Perhaps, we can choose two acts of penance each week from list no.5 in addition to abstinence from meat.

Days of penance from the Code of Canon Law numbers, 1250-1253

1. The days and times of penance for all the Latin Church are each Friday of the whole year and the season of Lent.
2. Abstinence from meat, or from some other food as determined by the Bishops’ Conference, is to be observed on all Fridays, except when a solemnity falls on a Friday. Abstinence and fasting are to be observed on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.
3. All are bound by the **law of abstinence** who have reached the age of fourteen.
4. The **law of fasting** applies to all who have attained their majority until after their fifty-ninth birthday. Pastors of souls and parents should ensure that even those who

are still too young to be bound by the laws of fasting and abstinence are trained to have a true appreciation of penance.

5. Those who are unable to observe fasting and abstinence may do penance in one of the following or similar ways instead. As examples: Going to the Holy Mass, praying the rosary, praying the Stations of the Cross, visiting the Blessed Sacrament, doing works of mercy, such as giving money to the poor, visiting the sick, praying for the dead, depriving themselves of some enjoyable food, abstaining from alcoholic drinks, giving up a show on TV or Video and many other ways of mortification. Eating meat on Friday would not be a sin if an alternative penance as suggested above is performed.

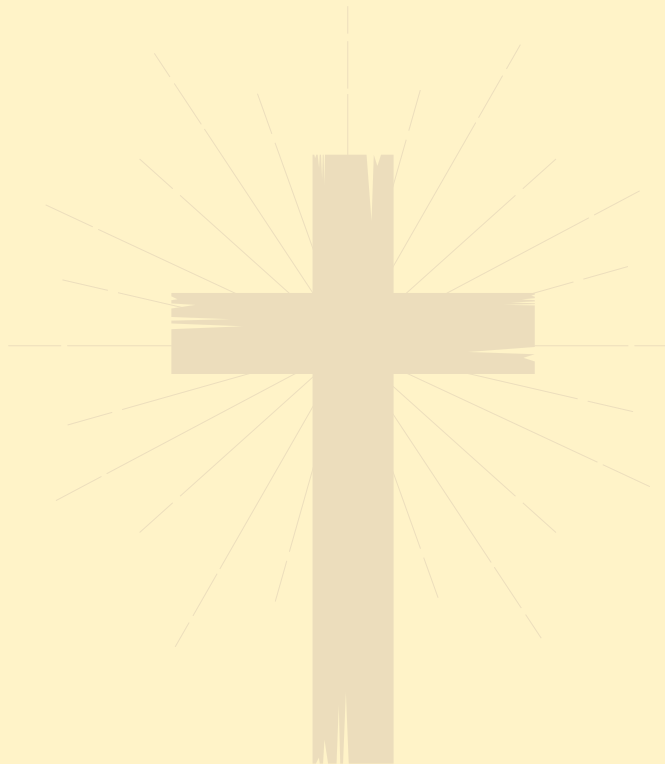
(Conference of Bishops of Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei on February 25, 1984)

Source: <http://www.heraldmalaysia.com/news/meat-on-friday/26054/13>

- Cultivating a habit of inconveniences for a sustainable way of life. For instance, tote-bag, water-bottle, tiffin-carriers or food containers, and e-paper where possible, i.e., newspapers and books. Action for first-timers: Try it twice a week when you shop groceries or buy food.
- Set a goal for (our / my) contribution to the Lenten Campaign, (our / my) "almsgiving" to the poor. For instance, saving each week or set aside our salary for the poor.

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT, 6 MARCH 2022

A Life-Generating Option



Message of *Laudato Si'*

This rupture is sin. The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations.

This in turn distorted our mandate to “have dominion” over the earth (cf. *Gen* 1:28), to “till it and keep it” (*Gen* 2:15). As a result, the originally harmonious relationship between human beings and nature became conflictual (cf. *Gen* 3:17-19). It is significant that the harmony which Saint Francis of Assisi experienced with all creatures was seen as a healing of that rupture. Saint Bonaventure held that, through universal reconciliation with every creature, Saint Francis in some way returned to the state of original innocence. This is a far cry from our situation today, where sin is manifest in all its destructive power in wars, the various forms of violence and abuse, the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and attacks on nature.

Laudato Si' #66

Take a little time to consider the aspect of sin. Sin is usually understood as what I did wrong. However, sin should be properly understood within the context of areas in our life that breaks or alienates us from our relationship with one another and with God. The Pope’s letter invites us to consider sin in relation to how we treat the most vulnerable and our attitude towards nature.

GOSPEL – LUKE 4:1-13

The temptation in the wilderness

Filled with the Holy Spirit, Jesus left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit through the wilderness, being tempted there by the devil for forty days. During that time, he ate nothing and at the end he was hungry. Then the devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to turn into a loaf.' But Jesus replied, 'Scripture says: Man does not live on bread alone.'

Then leading him to a height, the devil showed him in a moment of time all the kingdoms of the world and said to him, 'I will give you all this power and the glory of these kingdoms, for it has been committed to me and I give it to anyone I choose. Worship me, then, and it shall all be yours.' But Jesus answered him, 'Scripture says: You must worship the Lord your God, and serve him alone.'

Then he led him to Jerusalem and made him stand on the parapet of the Temple. 'If you are the Son of God,' he said to him 'throw yourself down from here, for scripture says:

He will put his angels in charge of you to guard you, and again:
They will hold you up on their hands

in case you hurt your foot against a stone.'

But Jesus answered him, 'It has been said:

You must not put the Lord your God to the test.'

Having exhausted all these ways of tempting him, the devil left him, to return at the appointed time.

REFLECTION

The three temptations are worth reflecting on because they are marked by an unhealthy love of self or narcissism. If Jesus gives in to them, they may result in his ministry failing to be life-giving and life-generating.

The first temptation points towards an attitude of self-satisfaction or self-preservation. It is to say, "I am in need, and I must be satisfied." The second temptation points towards the question of what do we depend on? The second temptation challenges us to consider whether we are persons who depend on everything and anything other than God. It can be a self-sufficient attitude where we say, I only need myself. The third temptation is the attitude of self-elevation or promotion. We may unconsciously think too highly of ourselves or possess the desire of wanting people to see how great we are.

The temptation of Jesus is something that we may have experienced. We may focus on ourselves and our needs to the extent that it prevents us from seeing and considering the needs of others. Let us ask ourselves simple questions:

- Do we think too highly of ourselves in what we say and do and get upset when people do not treat us that way?
- Do we seek only to be "happy" at the expense of others? For instance, my wife or even domestic helper has no other life than to make me happy.
- Do my possessions give me comfort in a way that I think they are all I need?
- Are there aspects of my life when I generously give and serve without expecting anything but so that all of us can grow to what God calls us to be?

LENTEN EXERCISE

Our consideration for this week of Lent is whether we can recognize a part of us that may be narcissistic. When things are only about us and what we want, we cannot be life-generating persons. How can there be a “you” and “other” when our world is only about “me”?

MY STAND

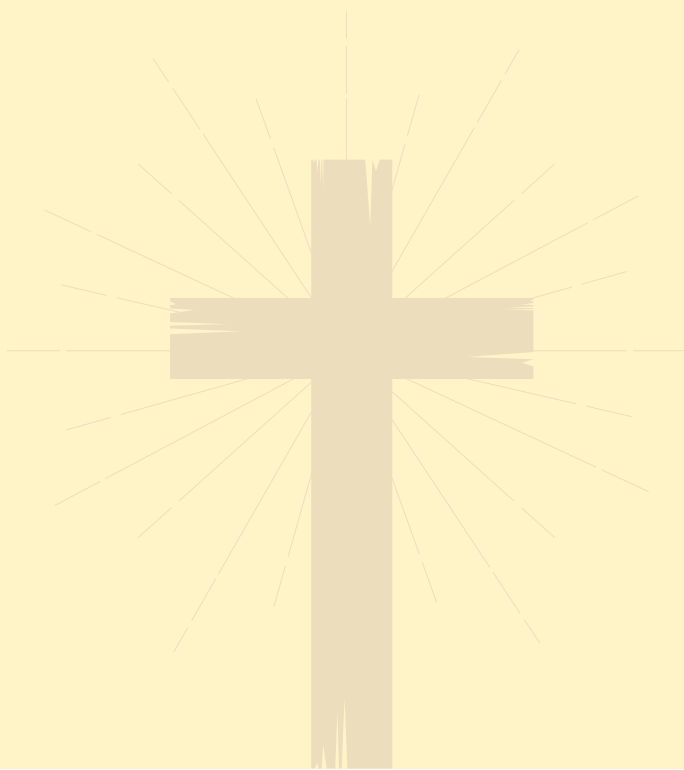
Who are my neighbours? Identify those in need around us. This is to help us concretely share and care for the elderly, the poor, the abandoned, the migrants, and the domestic helpers among us and those under our employ.

Action:

- Have we been abusive, verbally, physically, or psychologically to others, such as our loved ones? For instance, we have been abusive to our parents, children, or wives?
- If we have been abusive and cannot treat our domestic helpers with dignity, it is better not to have one. Make a stand by acting justly and lovingly towards them by helping them find employment in other places.
- Give just wages and even occasional treats like a meal (if none is usually provided or a short holiday) to the migrants working for you. Treat them as you would like them to treat you. Always act justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly among them.
- Regularly check in on the elderly in your parish community, especially the ones who live alone.

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT, 13 MARCH 2022

What remains?



Message of *Laudato Si'*

Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature. This is especially clear in the spirituality of the Christian East. "Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colours, in the lights, in the scents".

Laudato Si' #235

Take time to consider how we understand beauty within the context of our lives today. Is it something purely external or can we consider a harmonious relationship with God as something beautiful? Can we also consider that if we fail to see beauty in the world, it is because we have not cultivated ourselves to recognize and acknowledge beauty within and around us. If the ugliness around us has its roots from sin, similarly, can the beauty around us be partly contributed from the beauty within us?

GOSPEL – LUKE 9:28-36

Jesus is transfigured before them

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were

leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' - He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him.' And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

REFLECTION

Moses represents the law that the people of God had received before the time of Jesus. Elijah represents the prophets, the mouthpiece of God who came to remind people of the law. Jesus surpasses both as God incarnated. One understanding we can give to the incarnation, the Word made flesh, is that God entered and became part of creation. By his incarnation, Jesus became as we are in order to show us what we can be. The transfiguration is a glimpse of our destiny.

Peter and John wanted to stay on the mountain, but they could not. In the end, everything fades, and they had to press on. Tradition tells us that Peter died a martyr's death, but John lived to the entirety of his natural life. Similarly, we can only press on in our lives with faith. Jesus inspired our imagination that we can now imagine our life as a pilgrimage until we become fully what God calls us to be. As one saying goes, who we are is God's gift to us; who we become is our gift to God.

Isaiah 40:8 tells us, "The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God will stand for ever." In the transfiguration, when everything fades, Jesus remains. This is true too for our life as Christians. We believe that in the end, when everything fades,

only Jesus remains. The question is, what remains of us when our life here fades away, and we stand before Jesus? What do we have to show?

LENTEN EXERCISE

Laudato Si' speaks harmony and communion with creation. The Pope writes, "If the simple fact of being human moves people to care for the environment of which they are a part, Christians in their turn "realize that their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith" (LS#64). For our reflection, we can ask ourselves, are we moved to do our part in our care for the environment?

MY STAND

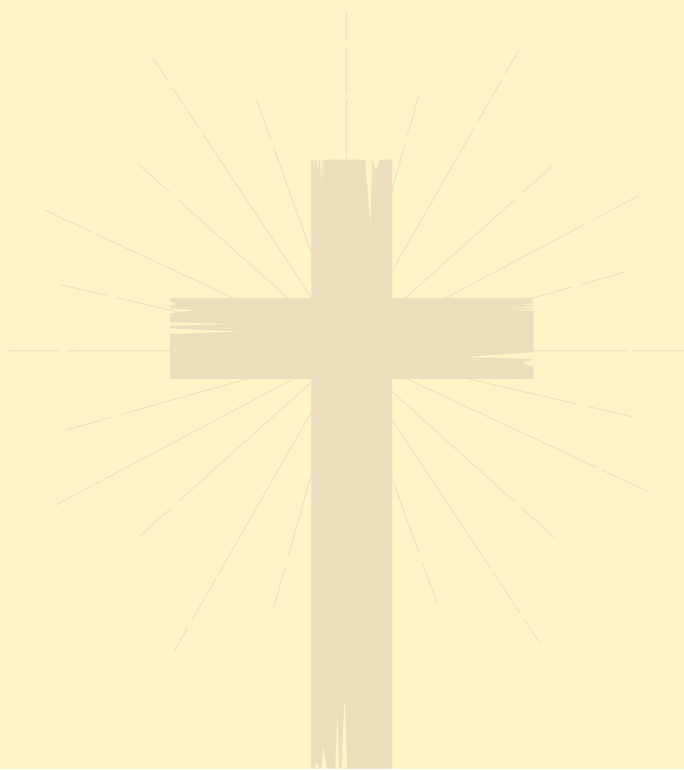
- Vigilance against being wasteful and extravagant. For instance, being watchful against excessive use of water and electricity. Water from washing rice and vegetables can be reused to water our plants. Always turn off the air conditioners and fans when we leave our house or rooms. Car-pool when possible.
- Sometimes, installing a ceiling fan, even though it may not fit with the interior design of your home, cools your room in such a way that you do not have to turn on the air-conditioning.

Action for first-timer:

- Try Carpooling once, watering plants with reused water, or turning off air conditions when we leave the room. Resist the temptation to leave air-conditioners on so that we can return to a cool room or house.
- Try starting to recycle. Find out at a personal level where you can recycle your aluminum cans and plastics? Some shopping malls have big containers where you can dispose of used batteries safely.

3RD SUNDAY OF LENT, 20 MARCH 2022

The Fruits of Repentance



Message of *Laudato Si'*

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. "Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world's salvation".

Laudato Si' #235

Take time to consider why we repent and what does it mean for us? Is it changing for the sake of changing, or does it stem from a recognition that there is a break or disharmony within us with others, creation, and God? Can our act of repentance lead to us being Christians who are life-giving, life-generating, in harmony with creation, and living lives according to the Spirit?

GOSPEL – LUKE 13:1-9

'Leave the fig tree one more year'

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it but found none. He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.'"

REFLECTION

The gospel reading offers an interesting insight about repentance, though Jesus did not make the connection directly. Our choices in our lives can lead us to bear fruit or make our spiritual lives barren when no life can grow. In Galatians 5, Saint Paul tells us that the "fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." He continues to say that if "we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (Gal 5:25-26).

It is possible to live a life that bears no fruit. They are lives marked by imbalanced selfish desires. It is a life that seeks to gratify our worst instincts. They include "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing" (Gal 5:19-21). However, now is still not too late to repent so that our life can bear fruit. The image of tree-bearing fruit can be an image of our lives that can be life-giving and life-affirming towards those around us. In walking by the Spirit, Saint Paul reminds us, "Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another" (Gal 5:26).

In this season of Lent, let us consider how our lives are bearing fruit. Let us be watchful that we do not get involved in a cycle of negativity, biting and devouring, until we consume one another.

The “whole law is fulfilled in one word, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14).

LENTEN EXERCISE

One way that we can show our love in a way that can bear fruit is to show our concern to the public places in our area. Though we move, live, and have our being in God, we do so within the conditions of where we live. Can we consider actions that contribute to the common good? Pope Francis writes, “Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone” (*Laudato Si’* #232).

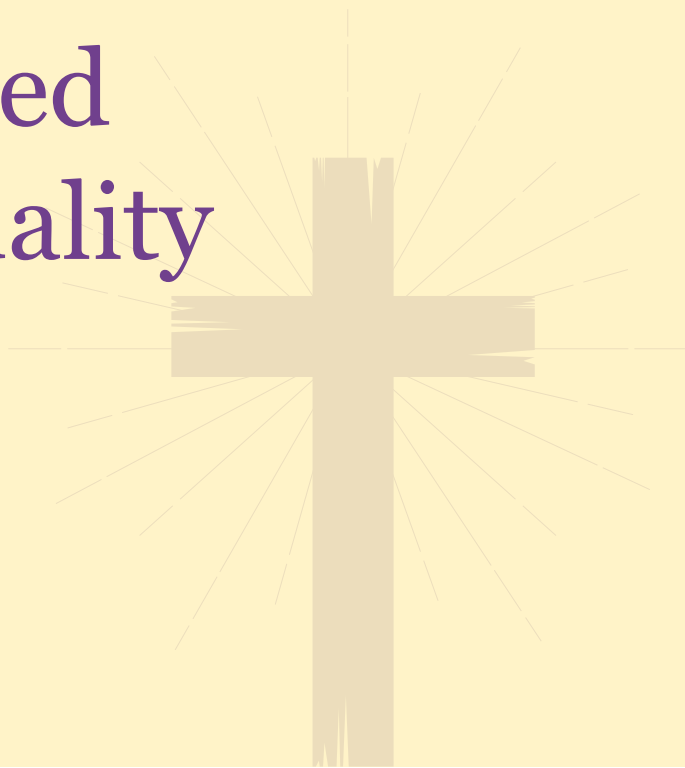
MY STAND

- Cultivate an attitude that shows concern for the public places in your area. For instance, could there be a landscape that is being used as a dumping area?
- Show concern for your church as a building that everybody shares. Discuss with your priest that your BEC would like to plan an activity to clean, improve and even beautify a neglected part of your church grounds.
- Let us evaluate and dialogue about our attitudes and efforts on our care for the environment with our families, housemates, and even at our Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC). We can do this in three steps.
 - How have (we/ I) cultivated (our/ my) “ecological virtues” or (our/ my) orientation toward care for the environment?

- What have (we/ I) done well?
- Are there areas for improvement?
- If none of the above: How can I start today?

4TH SUNDAY OF LENT, 27 MARCH 2022
(LAETARE SUNDAY)

Between
Repentance,
Righteous Anger,
and Creation-
Centered
Spirituality



Laetare Sunday is Latin for "Rejoice." What it tells us that even in the midst of our Lenten penance, the Church reminds us that there can be joy and hope because of our faith and hope that is rooted in the risen Lord, Jesus.

Message of Laudato Si'

This shows us the immense dignity of each person, "who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons". Saint John Paul II stated that the special love of the Creator for each human being "confers upon him or her an infinite dignity". Those who are committed to defending human dignity can find in the Christian faith the deepest reasons for this commitment. How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles! The Creator can say to each one of us: "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you" (Jer 1:5). We were conceived in the heart of God, and for this reason "each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary".

Laudato Si' #65

Take time to consider that we have many sides (or many aspects). There is a simultaneity to the way we are. This means that we can be both loving and hateful, generous and selfish, forgiving and bearing grudges, self-righteousness, and understanding at different times in our lives. Which of these parts win at times or most times in our lives and why? The week we look to God the Father to inspire us towards a creation-centered attitude, a way of being that is orientated and built on communion.

GOSPEL – LUKE 15:1-3,11-32

The prodigal son

The tax collectors and the sinners were all seeking the company of Jesus to hear what he had to say, and the Pharisees and the scribes complained. 'This man' they said 'welcomes sinners and eats with them.' So, he spoke this parable to them:

'A man had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, let me have the share of the estate that would come to me." So, the father divided the property between them. A few days later, the younger son got together everything he had and left for a distant country where he squandered his money on a life of debauchery.

'When he had spent it all, that country experienced a severe famine, and now he began to feel the pinch, so he hired himself out to one of the local inhabitants who put him on his farm to feed the pigs. And he would willingly have filled his belly with the husks the pigs were eating but no one offered him anything. Then he came to his senses and said, "How many of my father's paid servants have more food than they want, and here am I dying of hunger! I will leave this place and go to my father and say: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son; treat me as one of your paid servants." So, he left the place and went back to his father.

'While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with pity. He ran to the boy, clasped him in his arms and kissed him tenderly. Then his son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son." But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the calf we have been fattening, and kill it; we

are going to have a feast, a celebration, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." And they began to celebrate.

'Now the elder son was out in the fields, and on his way back, as he drew near the house, he could hear music and dancing. Calling one of the servants he asked what it was all about. "Your brother has come" replied the servant "and your father has killed the calf we had fattened because he has got him back safe and sound." He was angry then and refused to go in, and his father came out to plead with him; but he answered his father, "Look, all these years I have slaved for you and never once disobeyed your orders, yet you never offered me so much as a kid for me to celebrate with my friends. But, for this son of yours, when he comes back after swallowing up your property - he and his women - you kill the calf we had been fattening."

'The father said, "My son, you are with me always and all I have is yours. But it was only right we should celebrate and rejoice, because your brother here was dead and has come to life; he was lost and is found."

REFLECTION

There are three narratives centered around three characters in the gospel: the eldest son, the younger son, and the father. The gospel tells us that the youngest son saw the error of his ways and repented. He even decided to tell his father that he does not deserve to be treated as his son. In his repentance, he abandoned his previous state of being (selfishness/ hedonistic lifestyle/ his pride) in order to embrace his father again.

The second narrative is about the eldest son. Many scripture

scholars pointed to the parable of Jesus should be focused on the second son and not the prodigal son. The eldest son was visibly upset and angry that his younger brother had returned. He does not attempt to consider the process of his brother's journey that led his brother back. In a way, the eldest son did not "see" or "really see" his brother. Thus, there was no process for understanding.

The elder brother only saw what he did not get. He was the good one. He was the one who stayed. He was the one who did everything right, unlike his useless brother. Yet, he did not even get the calf for him and his friends to party. If things are left to him, perhaps, his brother will always be "categorized" as a useless brother and forever "dead." He is "ok" with his brother being "dead" forever.

Perhaps, the focus should be on the father who has a creation-centered orientation. To the father, everybody deserves to flourish and grow to be all they can be. There was no talk of second or third chances. There are always chances. The father's stance is one that is always ready and open. It was the father who first saw the younger son and ran to him. It was the father who first kissed and embraced him. It was the father who put a robe on him, a ring on his finger, and sandals on his feet. It was the father who called for a celebration. It did not end there. The father also came out to talk to the son to plead with him. Even the eldest son deserves to be brought out from his state of anger to a state of rejoicing. The father's attitude embodies what having a creation-centered spirituality is all about.

LENTEN EXERCISE

Are we cultivating a creation-centered spirituality? What kind of narrative always plays out in our life? Is it the younger son, the

eldest, or the father? We should be watchful that our attitudes are not like the eldest son who does not see goodness, is stuck in his ways, and where nothing can flourish because they have not met his approval. Those who have faltered may continue to remain “dead” with no hope for transformation or given “new life.”

However, the Father’s attitude is life-giving. Change, growth, and transformation are always possible with the father. The father was not concerned about giving his approval but that his son has come back to “life,” was lost and is “found.” The father wants both sons to be all that they can be. All the younger son had to do was repent and be open to the Father.

What kind of narrative do we live out? Are they a creation-centered spirituality that is life-giving and where life, joy, and rejoicing are possible? Or do we have the “elder-son” spirituality where nothing changes and the dead remain “dead?”

A final thought, is God more merciful than we are to one another?

“Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little.” (Luke 7:47)

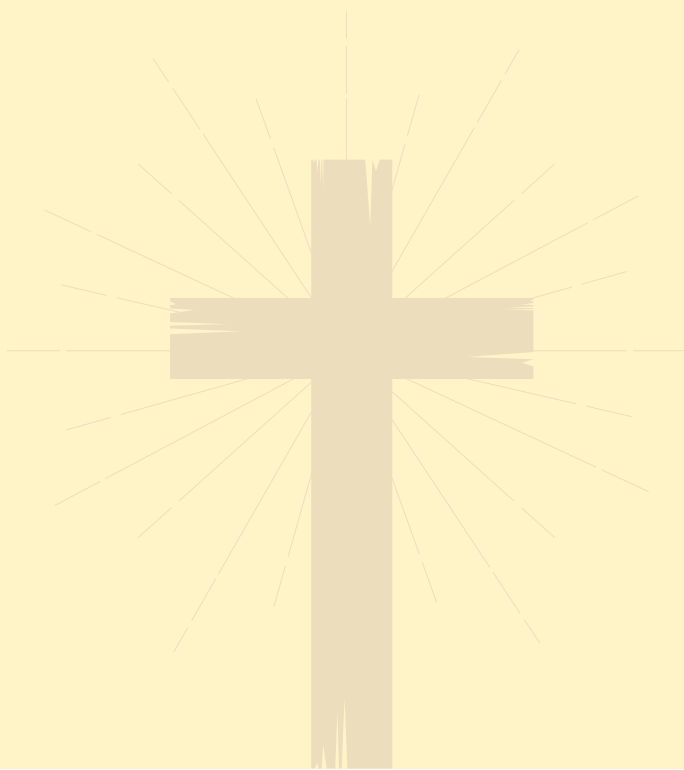
MY STAND

- Let us commit to cultivating a stance of “mercy” towards all, especially to the most vulnerable around us. The vulnerable are the poor, migrants, elderly, homeless, orphans, etc. During this time of Lent, let us choose to be merciful by being aware of those who are having a difficult time during this pandemic. We can help at a personal or communal level by:
 - Helping out the efforts of our district by distributing essential supplies.

- Offering a listening ear to those who have lost loved ones, are depressed, or facing crises because of the pandemic.
 - Not turning a blind eye when we see a neighbour in need.
 - Volunteer in BEC, POHD, SSVP led activities (if available) to serve struggling families in your area.
 - Lifting those who have suffered and died due to the pandemic in prayer.
- Can I identify people or loved ones around me whom I have refused to believe and accept that they can grow or change for the better that I am a stumbling block to what God calls them to be?

5TH SUNDAY OF LENT, 3 APRIL 2022

Religion for Love or Cruelty?



Message of *Laudato Si'*

Moreover, when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is “contrary to human dignity”. We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality: “Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism”. Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth.

Laudato Si' #92

Take time to consider the heart of religion, and in this case, the heart of being a Catholic. It could be that there is an overemphasis on looking at religion as an institution that we lost sight of what it is all about. Being a Christian means to believe and embrace God. It is a way of life built on love, where we flourish and grow as God's children.

GOSPEL – JOHN 8:1-11

'Let the one among you who has not sinned be the first to throw a stone'

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this, they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' 'No one, sir' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and do not sin any more.'

REFLECTION

1 John 4:7-8 may hold one of the most important passages in the bible for our Christian life. John beautifully tells us, "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know

God; for God is love." Mother Theresa is said to have shared, "We can do no great things, only small things with great love."

The religious leaders were not concerned about the law of God, its meaning, and its purpose. They do not appear to be guided by the question, "what is the most loving thing they can do for this woman?" They just wanted to trap Jesus, and they used the woman they caught to do it. In their way, the religious leaders used religion as a weapon to attack Jesus and as justification to stone the woman to death.

This week, let us ask ourselves what living a life as one who has accepted Jesus means for us. Then let us consider this in relation to some attitudes that we may have in our relationships with others.

LENTEN EXERCISE

This week, let us consider attitudes of cruelty. There may be a possibility that our following Jesus translate to a: "I am better than you" attitude. Is that the purpose and meaning of following Jesus? The questions we can ask ourselves this week are: Have we used our faith and belief as a weapon to attack others? Meaning, have we used prayer to insult or point out the faults of others? Have we shamed others because we do not see them pray or spend time in Church? Have we used prayer as part of our unresolved arguments and unresolved feeling?

MY STAND

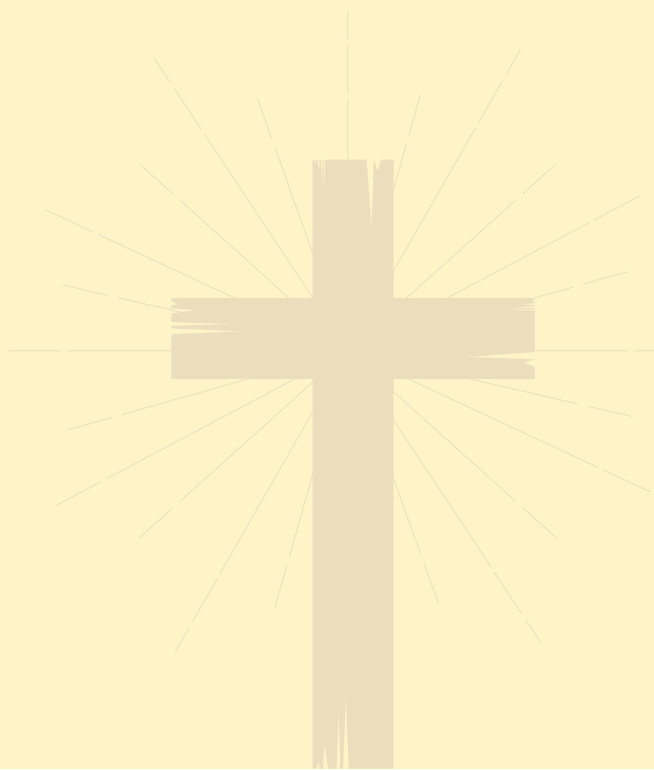
- I will stop using God and my faith to put others to shame, make them fearful or guilty.
- I will witness to a God of love and mercy by my way of life (as Mother Theresa did).
- I will not be cruel to animals.

CONCRETE ACTION

Who do (we/ I) pray for? Do we pray for our parents, loved ones, country, those who have died, the sick, the suffering, the migrants, our leaders, and the world that God will embrace them in God's love, or are they only deserving of our "criticisms?"

PALM SUNDAY, 10 APRIL 2022

From a Life of Disharmony to Harmony with God



Message of *Laudato Si'*

Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: "What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?" (*Mt* 8:27)....

In the Christian understanding of the world, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning: "All things have been created through him and for him" (*Col* 1:16). The prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) reveals Christ's creative work as the Divine Word (*Logos*). But then, unexpectedly, the prologue goes on to say that this same Word "became flesh" (*Jn* 1:14). One Person of the Trinity entered into the created cosmos, throwing in his lot with it, even to the cross.

Laudato Si' #98 - #99

Take time to consider the gift of faith. Take time to reflect on the beauty of faith. Take time to appreciate that faith opens and activates our life to this dynamic relationship with the mystery of God. Our encounter with Jesus is real and dynamic. The ongoing encounter with the person of Jesus through the Holy Spirit continues to shape and transform us. Our life is always fresh and hope-filled in our continual encounter with God, who, for us, is Beauty, ever ancient and ever new. Let nothing break this harmony between God and us.

GOSPEL – LUKE 23:34 - 47

Passion Reading - selected section

When they reached the place called The Skull, they crucified him there and the two criminals also, one on the right, the other on the left.

Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them; they do not know what they are doing'. Then they cast lots to share out his clothing.

The crucified Christ is mocked

The people stayed there watching him. As for the leaders, they jeered at him. 'He saved others,' they said 'let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.' The soldiers mocked him too, and when they approached to offer vinegar they said, 'If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself'. Above him there was an inscription: 'This is the King of the Jews'.

The good thief

One of the criminals hanging there abused him. 'Are you not the Christ?' he said. 'Save yourself and us as well.' But the other spoke up and rebuked him. 'Have you no fear of God at all?' he said. 'You got the same sentence as he did, but in our case we deserved it: we are paying for what we did. But this man has done nothing wrong. Jesus,' he said 'remember me when you come into your kingdom.' 'Indeed, I promise you,' he replied 'today you will be with me in paradise.'

The death of Jesus

It was now about the sixth hour and, with the sun eclipsed, a darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. The veil of the Temple was torn right down the middle; and when Jesus

had cried out in a loud voice, he said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my spirit' With these words he breathed his last.

After the death

When the centurion saw what had taken place, he gave praise to God and said, 'This was a great and good man.'

REFLECTION

Who do we identify with in the passion account of the gospel? Some spiritual writers ask us to consider that instead of the good thief or the centurion, we may be people who joined the crowd in shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him...!" This is because a part of us may tend to pettily be overly concerned about what other people are doing in a way that creates disharmony.

The proper focus of our Lenten observance is not other people but ourselves. It is essentially about our ongoing conversion experience. This is because our "YES" to Jesus is not a one-time thing. It is a YES that takes place with the context of us living out our lives. Along the way, we may have gotten lost or have lost sight of Jesus.

The Lenten practice is a call for us to renew our YES and to recommit to Jesus. Our relationship with the divine is not one-way. God is not a "static" being but engages the hearts of those who are open and are sincere. In this way, there can be a great dynamism in the spaces between our hearts and the heart of God. Repentance then creates the condition of the experience of "newness" and brings about "healing."

We are called to be like the good thief, who does not delight in the fall of others like his fellow thief is doing to Jesus. The good

thief acknowledged Jesus and repented at the cross. In doing so, he moves from a state of disharmony to harmony with God.

Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.

LENTEN EXERCISE

Reflect and examine our decisions and the stand we took during the season of Lent. Decide how to make what we started into a sustainable way of life for the rest of our lives, reflecting a creation-centered spirituality.

MY STAND

- Write my own short personal vision and prayer on how I can do my part to care for the earth and enter into harmony with creation. For instance, be charitable to my domestic helper, my colleagues, not being wasteful, or cut down plastics as much as possible.
- Set concrete goals to contribute to the Lenten Campaign 2022 and submit them to the parish or diocese.
- Volunteer to help my parish to be an eco-parish.