

Laudato Si': An Invitation from a Franciscan Jesuit

by Meghan Clark

Throughout *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis echoes his namesake, Francis of Assisi. It begins with a prayer of praise and lament; it begins with placing ourselves in relationship before God. “Praise be to you, my Lord through our Sister, Mother Earth” (no. 1) who “now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted upon her by our irresponsible use and abuse” (no. 2). Peace in our relationships and respect for all of creation—this is the heart of St. Francis’ model. Still, the pope is a Jesuit. In this Franciscan encyclical, we find an Ignatian invitation: to listen, examine our consciences, and discover the *magis* (Latin for “more”).

“I wish to address every person living on this planet . . . about our common home” (no. 3). This universal call to dialogue sets the tone for the entire encyclical—yet this is no simple invitation. In *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father models a listening Church. If we follow the footnotes, we find reference to Catholic conferences around the world: from Argentina, Germany, New Zealand, Brazil, Japan, the United States, and others. A profound engagement and dialogue with communities of scientists around the world leads the pope to recognize, “a very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system” (no. 23). He understands the fear, pain, suffering, and frustration of people around the globe because he listened. We are invited to listen as he has listened—to our neighbors, the earth, and to God.

Listening to *the cries of the poor and the cries of the earth*, we are then invited into an examination of conscience. Pope Francis implores “it is we human beings above all who need to change. We lack an awareness of

our common origin, of our mutual belonging, and of a future to be shared with everyone” (no. 202); “the emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs things to buy, own, and consume. . . . In this horizon, a genuine sense of the common good also disappears” (no. 204). We must look into our own hearts seeking *ecological conversion* as individuals and communities. Am I hearing the cries of the earth and the cries of the poor? Do we as a community responsibly cherish the earth? Do we respect the human dignity of vulnerable communities in the Pacific, people we will never meet? Do I consume more than I need? *Laudato Si'* invites us all to engage in an examination of conscience of our lifestyle.

Ignatian spirituality asks us to detach from our personal desires and listen to where God is calling us to something more—the *magis*. As Fr. James Martin, SJ, explains, the *magis* is not about perfection but seeking the greater. In this way, *Laudato Si'* invites us to rethink our standards and goals. Simply having more or creating more is not enough—we are not seeking the maximum but the greater. The *magis* teaches us to renounce selfishness in favor of more deeply choosing God and the common good. “We require a new and universal solidarity . . . all of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation, each according to his or her own culture, experience, involvements, and talents” (no. 14). As a community of faith, the ball is now in our court. Will we respond to Pope Francis’s invitation to embark on an ecological conversion by listening to the *cries of the earth and the cries of the poor* and responding in solidarity?

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