

Women Together Caring for Our Common Home

Today we were in the presence of powerful women, St. Clare of Assisi, Catherine Doherty, Dorothy Day, women religious, and Greta Thunberg thanks to another powerful woman, our presenter, Dr. Donna Orsuto who first guided us through reflections on *Laudato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home) and, in the second part of her presentation, spoke on women caring for our common home.

Laudato Si', published five years ago, is even more compelling today said Dr. Orsuto. In his March 27th *Urbe et Orbi* address, Pope Francis called “us to seize the time of trial as time of choosing”. We need to reflect on the encyclical to discern the choices we need to make for ourselves, families, communities, countries and the world, our common home. She noted that today was the feast of St. Clare of Assisi, writer of the first monastic rule written by a woman for women. While St. Clare did not write directly about the environment her attitudes are in tune. “Less was truly more” for her, recognizing the importance of our dependence on others, our need for care while reaching out to care for others, and the importance of learning to see and appreciate beauty. Indeed, care is mentioned in *Laudato Si'* over 30 times. Openness to see and wonder is key to ecological conversion. Dr. Orsuto urged us to pray to St. Clare and St. Francis to intercede, to deepen our understanding of care for our common home, to help us to discern what we can do to make a difference.

Part One: Caring for our Common Home the Message of *Laudato Si'*

A recent document published by the Vatican, *Journeying Towards Care our Common Home: five years after Laudato Si'*, highlights the encyclical's main message. “Everything is connected”, each particular crisis forms part of a complex socio-environmental crisis that requires a true ecological conversion. So, what is the encyclical saying to us?

Laudato Si' opens with praise, the canticle of St. Francis. “Our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.” That reflection is in the context of prayer which is an integral part of overcoming the ecological crisis. We are on earth but only as pilgrims journeying to eternity. This implies carrying only what is necessary, not wasting or accumulating, receiving all as gift and returning thanks.

Dr. Orsuto notes the methodology underlying *Laudato Si'* is the one common to Catholic social teaching—SEE, JUDGE, ACT, three words often used in her presentation.

- SEE: We must pay attention to what is happening. Hear the cry of the poor and the earth, and the see connection between them.
- JUDGE: The context for making good decisions is the Gospel of Creation; the earth belongs to all. Creation is not a problem to be solved but a joyful mystery to be pondered. We need to recognize our responsibility for the ecological crisis, tyrannical anthropocentrism. Pope Benedict said, “The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast.”
- ACT: The encyclical develops an integral ecology of daily life. Our decisions affect others and future generations. We need openness to ecological conversion, to radically change the way we live. What lifestyle does the pope propose? The effect of our encounter with Jesus

becomes evident in relationship with the world around us. Living our vocation to be protectors of creation is not optional.

In Chapter 6, Dr. Orsuto notes the key is deep Christian spirituality, prophetic, contemplative, with the conviction that “less is more”. We have a personal responsibility to embrace a prophetic, contemplative lifestyle. However, individual conversion, while important, is not enough. Community conversion must address the problem. How do we do this?

- BE CONNECTED: attentive, aware of creation and creatures.
- BE GRATEFUL: for creation’s beauty.
- REPENT: ecological sin needs to be brought into church.
- CHANGE LIFESTYLES: “Live simply so that others may simply live.”
- BE CLOSE: to the poor.

The website www.laudatosi.org also details ways to live *Laudato Si’*.

- PRAY: with and for creation. At council meetings, use prayer from the encyclical. Go outside to receive nature’s word of love. Hold a prayer service during the fall season of creation.
- LIVE SIMPLY: Adopt eco-friendly practices. Be present and listen to each other.
- ADVOCATE: Develop and support policies on issues such carbon dioxide emissions. Divest from fossil fuels. Connect with others, spread the word and invite people to join. The global crisis takes all of us working together. Pope Francis provides us with inspiration and a moral compass.

Dr. Orsuto asked us to take some time to respond to two questions. 1. How does Pope Francis inspire or encourage you as you reflect on how to respond to the ecological crisis? 2. Can you briefly share one idea that inspires you or one way that you have put into action the teachings found in *Laudato Si’*?

These questions could be used at a parish council meeting.

Part Two: Women Together Caring for our Common Home

We can influence how *Laudato Si’* is implemented by following the methodology of SEE, JUDGE, ACT.

- SEE: What have women done in the past? What are women doing now? St. Clare of Assisi espoused “less is more”. Catherine Doherty, founder of Madonna House, and Dorothy Day, founder of the Catholic Workers Movement, are 20th century leaders. Mrs. Doherty taught spirituality of the present moment and wrote on stewardship. One’s duty is what one should be doing at any given time where God has placed one, e.g., mother changing a diaper with great love for child and for God. “Duty of the moment is the duty of God.” Concern for the environment begins in careful study of the gospel where stewardship is pervasive and needs to be brought into everyday life including, stewardship of everything one uses, of one’s body as an icon of Christ, self discipline, and self stewardship, which leads to stewardship of all. Pope Francis praised Dorothy Day in 2015 as a passionate social activist inspired by the gospel. The Catholic Workers Movement put the gospel into practice, through works of mercy. Mrs. Day delighted in and learned from nature. We can learn more by reading *The Duty of Delight: The Diaries of Dorothy Day* and *All the Way to Heaven: The Selected*

Letters of Dorothy Day. We can learn from the women around us including, family, teachers, catechists, parish workers and hospital workers. There is also the witness of young people who have been born into ecological crisis not of their making. Many young people, such as Greta Thunberg, call us to action. The old need the young and the young need the old to make change. We have responsibility to the next generations. What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after? Dr. Orsuto cited the amazing work done by women religious in the implementing of *Laudato Si'*, such as the Union of Superiors General theme of *Sowers of Prophetic Hope* by care of the earth. Check out the World Union of Catholic Women's Organization (WUCWO) website www.wucwo.org for the president-general's June 2020 message.

- JUDGE: How can women best implement *Laudato Si'*? 1. Be connected. In communion, work together. Dr. Orsuto referred to an African proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together." 2. Be co-responsible. Bring forward Catholic social teaching on the environment. We need courage to be prophetic, together, aware of our connectedness, our community with others. We need to act in ways that demonstrate that we are co-responsible that we can make a difference.
- ACT: Where do we go from here? Create a popular movement, a family campaign. Pray together. With God's help we can make a difference.

Dr. Orsuto closed with saying the anniversary prayer for *Laudato Si'*, another good resource for League members.

Summary provided by Life Member Mary Nordick