

Living Social Justice . . . Laudato Si

Winter Focus: Consumerism and Overconsumption

“Laudato Si” diagnoses a society of “extreme consumerism” in which people are unable to resist whatever the market places before them, the earth is despoiled and billions are left impoverished. (203) In contrast with the consumerist mindset, Christian spirituality offers a growth marked by “moderation and the capacity to be happy with little”. (222) A resolution that “less is more” requires nothing less than a redefinition of our notion of progress. Wealthy countries have a responsibility to reduce consumption of non-renewable resources and should help poorer nations develop in sustainable ways. Technological and economic development must serve human beings and enhance human dignity, instead of creating an economy of exclusion, so that all people have access to what is needed for authentic human development.

Ponder:

- The emptier a person’s heart is, the more he or she needs to buy, own and consume. (204)
- Obsession with consumerist lifestyle, above all when few people can maintain this, it can only lead to violence and mutual destruction. (204)
- The earth, our home is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth. (21)
- Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. (222)
- We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent is worth it. (229)

Pray:

- Reflect on the environmental fact that creeks and rivers and other forms of moving water, including ice, manifest the flow of life itself. A gurgling stream or rushing river, even in midwinter’s rest is the sign that new life is coming forth, even when it is not yet perceptible in a snow-covered landscape.
- Pray for a deeper appreciation for water. Recall that pollution is a reality for millions who do not have safe drinking water.
- Examine your present habits of consumption and spending – do you have too much stuff? Or do you have just what you need? How might you respond to Pope Francis’ challenge for a change in lifestyle and consumption?

Practice:

- Use a reusable water bottle, take shorter showers, walk or take public transportation instead of driving, and buy energy-efficient appliances.
- Check out resources available through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops webpage on Environment and Environmental Justice (www.usccb.org/environment)