




**ON THE ROAD WITH SAINT FRANCIS**  
*He is the example par excellence of care for what is weak and of an integral ecology, lived with joy and authenticity*  
Laudato Si' 10

**PRAYER | DIALOGUE | LISTENING**

**Friday, 2nd of October 2020\* - online for 1h**

|                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 9.00 Argentina                     | 15.00 Romania, Holy Land |
| 12.00 Senegal                      | 20.00 Philippines        |
| 14.00 Italy, Burundi, Spain, Malta |                          |

*\*awaiting the new encyclical of Pope Francis: "Brothers all" on fraternity and social friendship*

Languages: Italian | Spanish | English      For registration: [www.catholicactionforum.org](http://www.catholicactionforum.org)

**Laudato Si'**  
Special Anniversary Year  
2020-2021

**SEASON OF CREATION**  
1.09 - 4.10.2020  
Jubilee of the Earth

## Intervention by Monsignor Domenico SORRENTINO

*Bishop of Assisi*

My contribution starts from the place where I live: the bishopric of Assisi. It is the place where, eight centuries ago, Bishop Guido welcomed the young Francis - just back from a hard tug-of-war with his father Pietro di Bernardone - and covered him with his cloak, while the young man "shocked" everyone with a prophetic gesture of his stripping. Francis stripped off his clothes and all earthly wealth. Above all, he stripped himself of himself in order to conform himself to Christ. His words are celebrated: "I will no longer say Father Pietro di Bernardone, but our Father who art in heaven".

To the pilgrims who visit what we now call the "Shrine of the Spoliation" I always say that this gesture of Francis was a prelude to the Canticle of Brother Sun. As we know, the Canticle was made by Francis during the last years of his life, when he was suffering in San Damiano, consoled by Chiara's gaze. But the premises of the Canticle were laid on the very day when he renounced earthly things, making himself naked with the bare earth. From that moment the things of the earth no longer belonged to him, but for this very reason all things became his. It may seem like a paradox, but it is nothing more than what Paul says when writing to the Corinthians: "everything is yours! But you are of Christ and Christ is of God "(1 Cor 3: 22-23).

Becoming a naked man, the young Francis had to, somehow, rediscover something of the freedom of Eden, something of that original harmony destroyed by sin. Freed from the golden chains of wealth, he can fully enjoy the beauty of things. He feels God as the universal Father, and all created things become his family, sisters and brothers: brother sun, sister water, brother fire, sister mother earth, etc.

It is understandable why Pope Francis, in the desire to offer a great spiritual horizon to the commitment for the care of the common home, chose Saint Francis as his teacher. The encyclical "Laudato si", right from the title, refers to his Canticle. In n.87 the pope mentions him almost entirely.

This textual resumption is placed at a point in the document in which the pope highlights the interconnection of all things, but also invites us to listen to the language through which all creatures indicate God as their source and principle. The Canticle of Brother Sun echoes the song of the universe, the wonderful symphony of creation, which praises its Creator.

The pope is not limited to the Canticle. He looks at Francis himself, at his spiritual traits, and recognizes him as a master of environmental care. This is what emerges in numbers 10 and 11. These are passages to reread:

«I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically... He was particularly concerned for God's creation and for the poor and outcast. ... He was a mystic and a pilgrim who lived in simplicity and in wonderful harmony with God, with others, with nature and with himself. He shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever he would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into his praise. ... His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists. ... If we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. »

There is no need for comment. In the words of the Pope, I limit myself to stress the emphasis placed on the perspective of contemplation and beauty. It is an aspect that is not always considered. As bishop of Assisi, for almost fifteen years, I have started my day singing the Canticle of Brother Sun. St Francis' gaze on nature is very surprising for me every time. His is not a quick glance at one or the other element, recalled only to praise God. This is found, for example, in the biblical perspective of the canticle of Daniel: "Bless all works of the Lord, the Lord .... Bless the Lord, sun and moon ... (cf. Dan 3: 52-90). In the "Canticle of Brother Sun" there is something more: Francis lingers on things, admiring their qualities. When he speaks of the sun, he says that it is beautiful, radiant, of great splendor. When he talks about water, he adds that it is useful, humble, precious and chaste. And so on. I believe this attitude is important to cure a disease of our technological culture, where everything is thought and lived in terms of efficiency. We are more and more the culture of "hurry up", of speed, of stress, of twitter. Let's run. We have no time to "rest" in our relationship with created things, and so we go beyond nature, whizzing on our highways, without enjoying its beauty. This mentality makes us feel nature more and more distant, and gives us the temptation to feel masters of it. We throw seas of concrete into the green, we tread entire forests, devastating the environment and destabilizing its balance. We don't use, but rather abuse things. Environmental problems also arise from this attitude.

A last important perspective that Pope Francis underlines, speaking of the relationship between St. Francis and nature, is what I would call "mystical": his feeling that it is a book in which God speaks to us and "transmits us something of his infinite beauty and goodness "(LS 12).

Which is the relationship between nature and God?

Francis takes us to a renewed immersion in nature. However, there is a temptation to avoid, which certainly could not be attributed to the Saint of Assisi. One cannot yield, in the name of "universal and cosmic fraternity", to pantheism, which does not limit itself to see the presence of God in things, but identifies things with God himself. It would be idolatry. Nothing could be further from Christian and Franciscan thought. Another temptation that winds in the ecological recovery of our time is extremism that prevents us from grasping the difference between things, to the point of denying the specificity of mankind with respect to the material world and animals. When Francis of Assisi gives a "brother" or "sister" to one or the other, he uses the concept of fraternity in an analogical way, without in the least questioning the dignity of the human being. If you read the Canticle well, you will also see the thin "humanistic" thread that runs through it: not the dominating anthropocentrism, but the dignity of the human being who becomes the guardian of everything around him.

They are fundamental concepts and vital distinctions. By distancing ourselves from them, the care of the "common home" opens up to all the arbitrators, does not reach its purpose, and causes worse evils than those it seeks to cure. It is no coincidence that the Canticle ends with a great invitation that has humility as its last term: "Praise and bless my Lord, and thank them and serve them with great humility".