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CHALLENGES FROM *LAUDATO SI'*

"Living our vocation to be protectors of God's handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or secondary aspect of our Christian experience." (217)

1. CELEBRATE Beauty

"See nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness...The world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise." (12)

God created the world as a gift and our common home. In natural beauty we see signs of the Father's love for us, his majesty, and his blessings. Celebrating beauty draws us beyond our self-interest into appreciation and gratitude for all Creation.

ACTION: Take time to be outside! Find the natural beauty in your community, and in doing so offer thanks to God for the beauty of all created things, including one another.

REFLECTION: What can I hear God saying to me when I experience the beauty of nature?

2. LIVE in a Global Community

"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 are worth it." (229)

Since everyone and everything is created by God, all of creation is interconnected. Recognizing this draws us into a spirituality of global solidarity, especially prioritizing the needs of those who cannot protect themselves: the poor, weak, and vulnerable. Practicing solidarity helps us overcome the temptation toward individualism and self-interest.

ACTION: Make a commitment this week to serve the needs of the poor in a concrete way. Consider opportunities through Catholic Charities (Catholiccharitiesdc.org) or Catholic Relief Services (www.CRS.org).

REFLECTION: Who are the people in my community or the larger world I don't think or pray about? How do the daily choices I make have an impact on the poor? (Use of natural resources, how I spend time and money, where I shop, etc.)

3. SLOW DOWN and Unplug

"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." (225)

By the work of our hands God has blessed us with the ability to participate with Him in the creative cultivation of the world. Yet unending busyness, constant noise and addiction to technology often distract us from recognizing God in small places and quiet moments. God gives us the Sabbath as a day to give thanks and to rest in His love, centered on the gift of the Eucharist.

ACTION: Find time each day, especially on Sundays, for quiet moments to talk with and listen to God.

QUESTION: Does my use of technology connect me to or distract from my relationship with God? How do I celebrate Sunday as a day set apart by the Lord as a day of rest?

4. PRACTICE Small Acts of Love

"Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness." (230)

An "integrated ecology" reminds us of our interconnectedness and our "duty to care for creation through little daily actions". Being intentional about practicing small daily habits such as "turning off unnecessary lights" or not wasting food can be an "act of love" and help us live in solidarity with those in most need.

ACTION: Practice a new small act of love as a way of living solidarity with those in most need and being a more responsible steward of God's gifts. For ideas, consider the list Pope Francis includes: Use less heating or air conditioning. Avoid using paper and plastic. Reduce water consumption. Reuse and recycle. Don't waste food. Show care for other living beings. Use public transportation or carpooling. Plant trees. Turn off lights & reduce electricity use, etc.

REFLECTION: How do my daily actions and personal decisions impact the world around me?

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