

Vatican City, September 14th, 2022

Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

At the end of this hot summer that has awakened in many of us some concerns about the progress of the "garden of the world", I would like to share with you a brief reflection; I allow myself to be guided above all by the heartfelt message that the Holy Father Francis wanted to address to all the faithful in his encyclical *Laudato si'*, *On the care of the common house*.

Today, as we celebrate the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, we are invited to remember that "according to the Christian understanding of reality, the destiny of all creation passes through the mystery of Christ, present from the beginning [...] . A Person of the Trinity entered the created cosmos, sharing its destiny until the cross".

First of all, such an understanding tells us that Christianity is not a religion that despises corporeity, but also redirects the body and all the material aspects to the providential plan of redemption and salvation. This is what the Apostle reminds us of in the Hymn to the Philippians when speaking of the humiliation of the Son who became a man: "Although he was divine in nature, he did not regard his equality with God as a jealous treasure; but he stripped himself, assuming the condition of a servant and becoming like men; appearing in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death and death on the cross" (Phil 2, 6-8). Thus all "creation belongs to the order of love [...] and every creature is the object of the Father's tenderness". As Christians we must live in harmony with the creation in which we are inserted, loving both the biggest as well as the smallest and apparently superfluous things.

All creation, the object of God's love, needs respect, attention and loving care from us.

Cultivating this attitude of attention towards our "sister earth" will let us realize that we are all connected in a communion that makes us brothers: "Everything is related. The authentic care of our own life and of our relations with Nature - Pope Francis declares - is inseparable from fraternity, justice and fidelity to others".

Neglecting a correct relation with creation harms man in his entirety because God in his Wisdom wanted to insert him into this world. It is precisely from the Genesis that we learn that the original harmony was broken by man's desire to replace God: "[Adam and Eve] by their sin destroyed the existing harmony by deliberately going against the Creator's plan. This led not only to man's alienation from himself, to death and fratricide, but also to a certain rebellion of the earth against him".

A correct relation with the creation can remind us of two things: first, that we are guardians, but not owners of this world. As custodians we are called to love and respect what has been entrusted to us, exercising loving care towards the creation and not despotic domination. As Christians, making our own the

biblical teaching and the example of the Saints, we must strive to live as pilgrims on this earth, in the awareness of being "little" men subject to the transience of life in the immensity of creation. While acknowledging the infinite dignity that God has given to men, we must avoid the attitude of a deviant and despotic anthropocentrism: "Every creature - teaches the CCC - has its own goodness and its own perfection [...]. The various creatures reflect, each one in its own way, a ray of the infinite wisdom and goodness of God. Therefore, men must respect the goodness of each creature, to avoid a disorderly use of things".

Living a harmonious relation with the creation also reminds us that our faith is very concrete and is situated in a well-determined context; we must avoid the temptation of limiting faith only to the devotional and intimate realm. The faith of every Christian is rooted in the daily reality: it appears within our family, with friends, at work, in the relations with nature and, ultimately, in all the areas in which people take actions. As the Holy Father reminds us, "Jesus also lived in full harmony with creation [...]. He worked with his hands, taking daily contact with the material world created by God to shape it with his craftsmanship. [...] Most of his life was dedicated to this commitment and lived in a simple way. In this way he sanctified the work and gave it a particular value».

In this world in which God created us and invites us to care and love, we can learn the simplicity from the birds: "Look at the birds of the sky: they do not sow, nor do they reap, nor gather in barns; however, their heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth more than them? And who of you, no matter how worried he is, can prolong his life even a little bit?

The consolation that can come to us from these words that refer to the love of God that embraces everything and excludes nothing is great: "Can't we sell five birds in exchange for little money? And yet not one of them is forgotten by God» .

Let us try to have a simple and direct relation with God, always remembering that "God is love". May our response to it also be modeled on love, with spontaneity and immediacy, avoiding calculations and strategies, letting it spring spontaneously from our hearts. Just as the impetuosity of love spontaneously leads us to desire the loved one, so be our relationship with God: tender, simple and irresistible at the same time.

I cordially impart my blessing to each of you.

Renato Raffaele Cardinal Martino