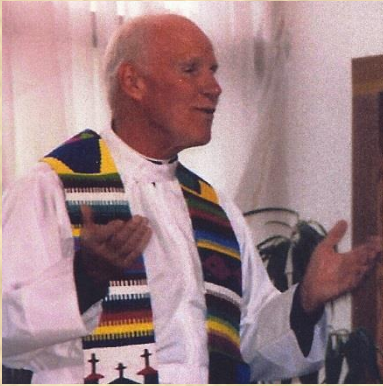


## LAUDATO SI ON CARE FOR OUR COMMON HOME



**Rev. Gerald E. Kelly, M.M.**, served as a Maryknoll missionary in Chile and is now Director of Maryknoll's Southern Region for Mission Education & Promotion. Fr. Gerry grew up in Boston and attended Boston College. He served as Army Aviator before entering the Maryknoll Seminary. Fr. Gerry was ordained in 1967 and spent 25 years in Chile working with the Mapuche Indians and later in Urban Ministry. He spent seven years as the Latin American Coordinator for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers, whose official name is The Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America. He presently resides at Maryknoll's House in Houston, Texas. He is past Chairperson and present member of the Texas Mission Council

which represents the 15 Catholic Dioceses in Texas. Fr. Gerry is Director of the Third Wave Mission Institute which comprises members from many U.S. Faith-based organizations who are designing training modules for short term mission by lay persons from parish twinning and volunteer mission organizations.

Pope Francis has given us a magnificent encyclical to reflect on and also to put into practice. He develops the encyclical around the concept of *"integral ecology."* He wishes to describe the relationship of the person with God, with one's self, with other human beings, and with creation.

Pope Francis asks a number of basic questions: *"What Kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us? What is the purpose of our life in this world? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?"* (#160)

Pope Francis proclaims in the opening lines that the earth is our common home: *"It is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us."* (#1)

However, Pope Francis is concerned with the throwaway culture which surrounds us and in which we are all involved. *"The earth cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will."* (#2) He calls us to an ecological conversion.

Still, Pope Francis maintains a positive tone throughout the encyclical. He is not a prophet of doom and gloom. *"Human beings are capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start."* (#13)

In Chapter I Pope Francis gives us a review of the questions which are troubling us today. He warns us that we can no longer avoid dealing with them. He is concerned with pollution and climate change. First of all he deals with climate change, which he sees as one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day. *He states "a number of scientists indicate that most global warming is due to the great concentration of greenhouse gases (#23) ...and the problem is aggravated by the intensive use of fossil fuels."* He talks about the loss of biodiversity. Thousands of species are disappearing every year, which our children will never see.

Pope Francis is saddened about *"a decline in the quality of human life."* (#47) He tells us that the gravest effects of all attacks on the environment are suffered by the poorest. *"We must hear the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."* (#49)

In Chapter II the Pope wishes us to have an intense dialogue of religion and science. He warns us that we have often misinterpreted the bible's use of dominion. He criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism. It is a mistake to view other human beings *"as mere objects subjected to arbitrary domination."* (82) He emphasizes that each creature has its own purpose, nothing is superfluous and that all creatures are manifestations of God.

In Chapter III Pope Francis looks at the roots of the ecological crisis. He sees that technologies have given us dominance over the whole of humanity. Yet contemporary man has not been trained to use power well. He sees the lack of a development in human responsibility, values and conscience.

He calls for a bold cultural revolution. *"We need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, we need to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur."* (#114)

In Chapter IV Pope Francis discusses in depth the elements of this integral ecology, saying that integral ecology is a new paradigm of justice. Due to the interrelation of creatures with one another, which makes up what we call "ecosystems", our very existence depends on them. So, when we speak of sustainable use, consideration must always be given to each ecosystem's regenerative ability in its different areas and aspects. (#140) He points to the Indigenous communities *"For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact."* (#144)

Pope Francis urges an ecology of daily life. He urges urban planners to protect common areas which increase our sense of belonging or rootedness and of feeling at home. He calls us to care for our bodies, and to respect its fullest meaning.



The Pope is concerned for the common good. It is a central and unifying principle of social ethics. He also calls for justice between the generations. We need to leave an inhabitable planet to future generations.

In Chapter V Pope Francis calls us to seek for a diminished use of raw materials, removing from the market products which are less energy-efficient or more polluting, improving transport systems, and encouraging the construction and repair of buildings. All of this is aimed at reducing their energy consumption and levels of pollution.

In Chapter VI the Pope deals with ecological education and spirituality. Many things have to change "*but it is human beings who have to change,*" and to remember our common origin. He calls us to a new lifestyle: "*The market tends to promote extreme consumerism in an effort to sell its products.*" (#203) The ecological crisis is a summons to profound interior conversion for all people, whereby the effects of their encounter with Jesus Christ become evident in their relationship with the world around them.

The mission teams going forth from St. John Vianney are models of the integral ecology that Pope Francis speaks about. They follow the Little Way of St. Therese of Lisieux. They 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. They go to one of the poorest areas in our country with significant ecological destruction. They immerse themselves in the lives of the people. They form strong bonds amongst themselves, and they grow closer to God by leaving their comfort zones and putting all of their hopes in Him. They live the prayer with which Pope Francis finishes his encyclical:

*Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  
to be filled with awe and contemplation,  
to recognize that we are profoundly united  
with every creature  
as we journey towards your infinite light.  
We thank you for being with us each day.  
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.*

Rev. Gerald E. Kelly, M.M.  
Southern Region Director  
Mission Education & Promotion  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers