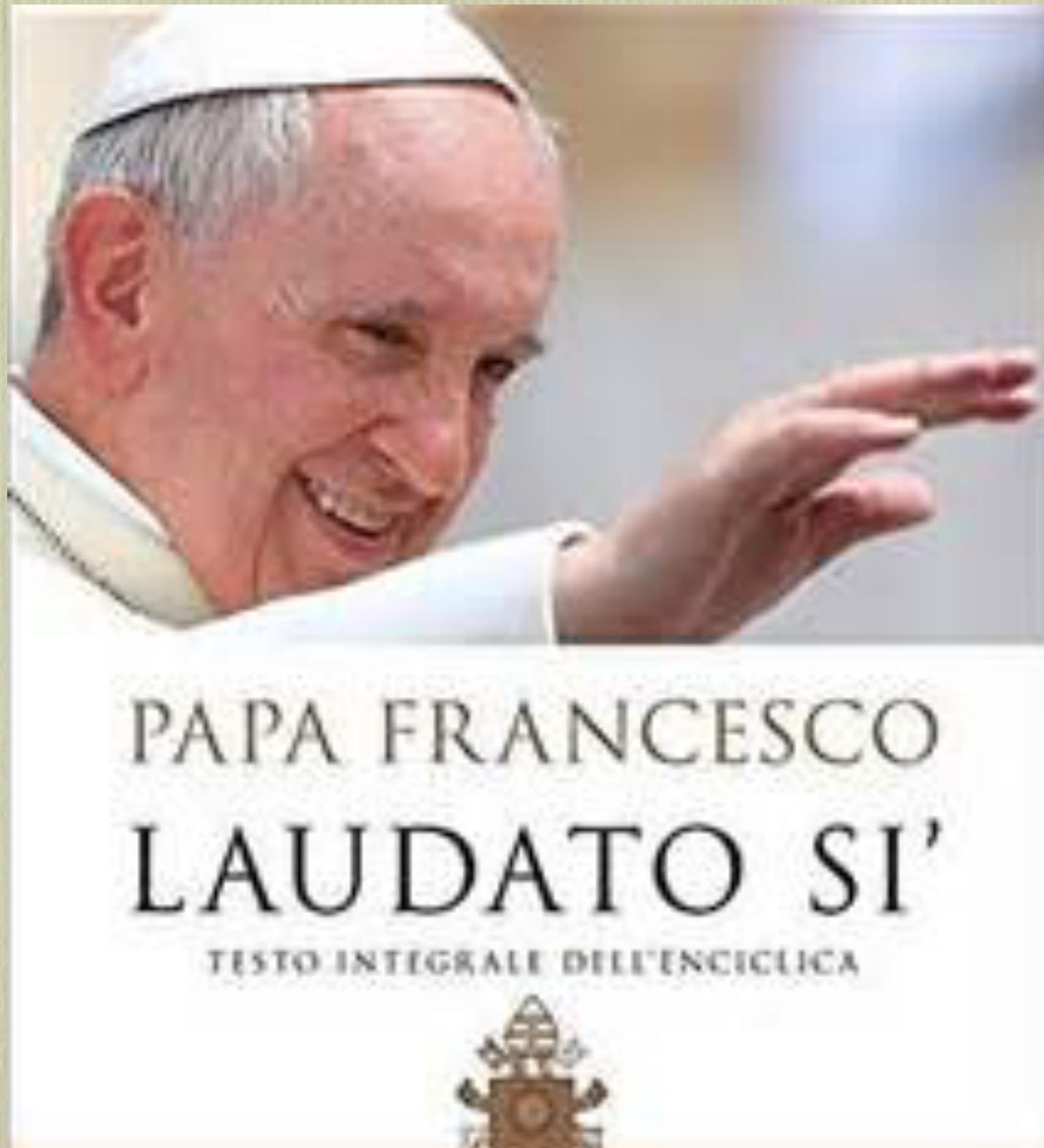


o6. Call to care for our Beautiful home





Pope Francis begins his encyclical with these words:

“Laudato si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”(n.1).



‘This sister now 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’(n.2).



‘The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she “groans in travail” (*Romans* 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. *Genesis* 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters’(n.2).

Later he quotes Benedict XVI : “The external deserts in the world are growing because the internal deserts have become so vast” (n. 217).

‘The urgent challenge to protect our common **home** includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common **home**. Here I want to recognise, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the **home** which we share’(n. 13).

Pope Francis uses the term ‘**home**’ 25 times!

Pope Francis concludes his Introduction with this appeal:

‘I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. The worldwide ecological movement has already made considerable progress and led to the establishment of numerous organizations committed to raising awareness of these challenges. Regrettably, many efforts to seek concrete solutions to the environmental crisis have proved ineffective, not only because of powerful opposition but also because of a more general lack of interest. Obstructionist attitudes, even on the part of believers, can range from denial of the problem to indifference, nonchalant resignation or blind confidence in technical solutions’(n.14).

Pope Francis has a lot to say about ecology: about the interaction between creatures, and between creatures and their environment.

His focus, however, is not on climate, or even ecology, but on ‘ecological conversion’.

He is writing as a pastor and his concern is for the human heart.

Our abuse of ourselves, of other creatures, of the ecology issues from an unconverted heart.

‘It is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person’(Mark 7:21-23).

‘Our goal is ... to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it’(n.19).



Jeremiah 12:4, 10-13

How long will the land mourn, and the grass of every field wither?
For the wickedness of those who live in it
the animals and the birds are swept away,
and because people said, “He is blind to our ways.” ...

Many shepherds have destroyed my vineyard,
they have trampled down my portion,
they have made my pleasant portion a desolate wilderness.
They have made it a desolation; desolate, it mourns to me.
The whole land is made desolate, but no one lays it to heart.
Upon all the bare heights in the desert spoilers have come ...
from one end of the land to the other; no one shall be safe.
They have sown wheat and have reaped thorns,
they have tired themselves out but profit nothing.

The encyclical has six chapters:

In Chapter One (nn. 17-61) Pope Francis describes what is happening to our common home.

In Chapter Two (nn. 62-101) he speaks of the light shed by faith, of the wisdom contained in the Bible, of the mystery of the universe. He reminds us that **‘everything is connected. Concern for the environment needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society’** (n.91). He concludes this chapter by speaking of the gaze of the risen Christ who is holding the universe in love and guiding it towards its goal.



In Chapter Three (nn. 102- 137) he focuses on the human roots of the problem.

In Chapter Four (nn. 138-163) he states: ‘We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature’(n. 139).

He introduces Chapter Five (nn. 163-202) with the words: 'So far I have attempted to take stock of our present situation, pointing to the cracks in the planet that we inhabit as well as to the profoundly human causes of environmental degradation. Although the contemplation of this reality in itself has already shown the need for a change of direction and other courses of action, now we shall try to outline the major paths of dialogue which can help us escape the spiral of self-destruction which currently engulfs us'(n. 163).

Chapter Six (nn. 203-237) is entitled: ‘Ecological Education and Spirituality’. Since this is a retreat we thought it best to begin here, and specifically with the Pope’s statement:

‘The relationship between a good aesthetic education and the maintenance of a healthy environment cannot be overlooked. By learning to see and appreciate beauty, we learn to reject self-interested pragmatism. If someone has not learned to stop and admire something beautiful, we should not be surprised if he or she treats everything as an object to be used and abused without scruple.(n. 215).



‘If we want to bring about deep change, we need to realise that certain mindsets really do influence our behaviour. Our efforts at education will be inadequate unless we strive to promote a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society, and our relationship with nature. Otherwise, the pragmatism of consumerism will continue to advance, with the help of the media and the highly effective workings of the market’(n. 215).

If we see something as beautiful we will want to reject whatever destroys that beauty.

This brings us to the topic of this reflection: the beauty of the universe, our common home.

This takes us back to the opening words of the encyclical: “Praise be to you, my Lord”. In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us”(n.1).

‘By means of all created things the divine assails us, penetrates us and moulds us. We imagined it as distant and inaccessible, whereas we live steeped in its burning layers. “In him we live”. As Jacob said, awakening from his dream, the world, this palpable world which we were wont to treat with the boredom and disrespect with which we habitually regard places with no sacred association for us, is in truth a holy place and we did not know it.’

‘Through the wonders of creation is filtered the Wonder of the Creator shining through all that is made. In the presence of such wonders, *dadirri* is described as “deep listening, silent awareness, quiet stillness”, as Transcendence draws me out in wonder to all about me. It is also described as “waiting” as Transcendence beckons me unhurriedly into the future. According to Aboriginal intuition, the land and all within it is alive, conscious and aware. It enjoys its own *dadirri*, and I can engage with the *dadirri* of the land. Out of this mutual attentiveness I sense with it a harmony, a mystical union and a cosmic wholeness, as it responds to my awareness, a totality that is still, alert, listening, waiting, knowing, loving’(Eugene Stockton “Wonder: a way to God”(St Pauls 1988, page 23-24).

We are reflecting on beauty in the context of what Pope Francis has to say about how we humans are destroying our beautiful home. He reminds us:

‘Each year hundreds of millions of tons of waste are generated, much of it non-biodegradable, highly toxic and radioactive, from homes and businesses, from construction and demolition sites, from clinical, electronic and industrial sources. The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth’(n. 21).



‘Many cities are huge, inefficient structures, excessively wasteful of energy and water. Neighbourhoods, even those recently built, are congested, chaotic and lacking in sufficient green space. We were not meant to be inundated by cement, asphalt, glass and metal, and deprived of physical contact with nature’(n. 44).

He alerts us to the fact that ‘whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which become the only rule’(n. 56).

‘We need only to take a frank look at the fact to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair’(n. 61).

You cannot paint a rotten apple red and expect to enjoy its taste!

‘God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement’(n. 89).

‘Our goal is ... to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it’(n.19).

‘We know how unsustainable is the behaviour of those who constantly consume and destroy, while others are not yet able to live in a way worthy of their human dignity’(n. 193).

‘Faith allows us to interpret the meaning and the mysterious beauty of what is unfolding’(n. 79).

‘The Canadian bishops rightly pointed out that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God: “From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine”.
(n. 85)



The bishops of Japan, for their part, made a thought-provoking observation: “To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God’s love and hope”(n. 85).



‘At the end, we will find ourselves face to face with the infinite beauty of God (cf. *1 Corinthians* 13:12), and be able to read with admiration and happiness the mystery of the universe, which with us will share in unending plenitude’(n. 243).



G. M. Hopkins 'Pied Beauty'

Glory be to God for dappled things –

For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;

For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;

Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;

Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough;

And ál trades, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things counter, original, spare, strange;

Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)

With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change:

Praise Him.

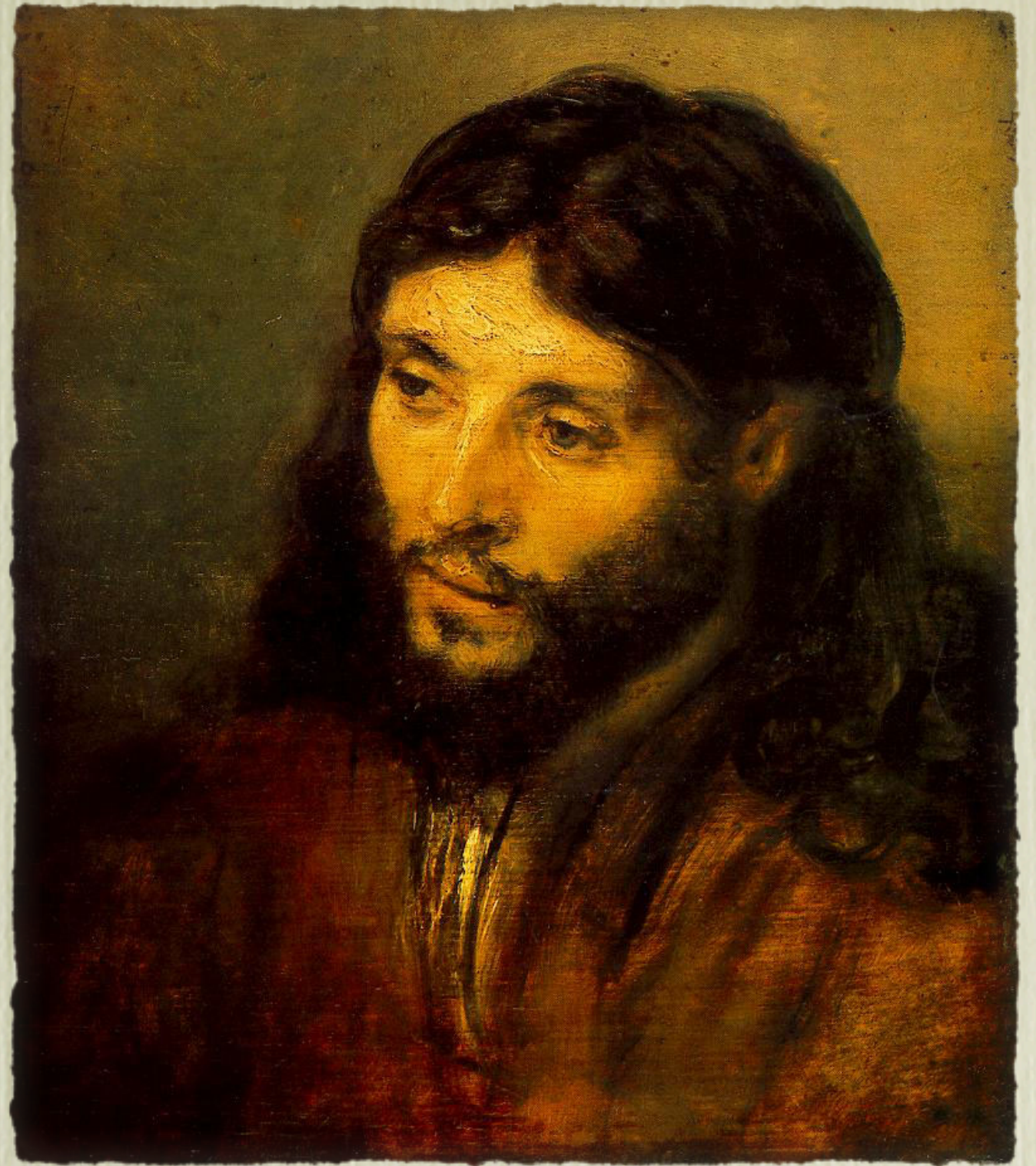
Catechism n. 340

‘God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the tiny flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other.’

In his Apostolic Exhortation,
The Joy of the Gospel, n. 167,
Pope Francis wrote:

‘We would do well to attend
to the “way of beauty”.

Proclaiming Christ means
showing that to believe in
and to follow Him is not
only something right and
true, but also something
beautiful, capable of filling
life with new splendour and
profound joy.’





Yes, the Word made flesh is beautiful.

Jesus reveals in his person the beauty of God.

He is the human sacrament of God's beauty.

He is 'God's Word in human flesh' (John 1:14)

He is 'the radiance of God's glory' (Hebrews 1:3)



Jesus reveals what the cosmos is:
the sacrament of God's beauty.

Creation is the expression of God's Word

‘and the Word was towards God,
and the Word was God’(John 1:2).

“Creation is like a first revelation, which has its own eloquent language.

It is almost like another sacred book, whose letters are represented by the millions of creatures present in the universe” Pope John Paul II



“The cosmos is the primary sacrament” (Benedict XVI)

John of the Cross : *‘The Spiritual Canticle’*.

Stanza 5

Pouring out a thousand graces,
He passed these groves in haste;
And having looked at them,
with his image alone
He clothed them in beauty.

‘With the image of His Son, God clothed creatures in beauty by imparting to them supernatural being. This He did when God’s Word became man and “lifted everything up to Himself”(John 12:32)’(5.4).



John of the Cross, Spiritual Canticle 5.4

‘Not only by looking at them did he communicate natural being and graces, as we said, but also with this image of his Son alone, he clothed them in beauty by imparting to them supernatural being.

This he did when he became man and elevated human nature in the beauty of God, and consequently all creatures, since in human nature he was united with them all. Accordingly the Son of God proclaimed: If I be lifted up from the earth, I will elevate all things to myself (John 12:32).

And in this elevation of all things through the Incarnation of his Son and through the glory of his resurrection according to the flesh not only did the Father beautify creatures partially, but, we can say, he clothed them entirely in beauty and dignity.’

Dr Elizabeth Theokritoff

‘Our task in the world, I suggest, is to receive gifts from our concelebrant creatures, spiritual and ethical gifts as well as physical ones. And to learn from those creatures so that our lives also offer up the wisdom and rationality that animates the entire cosmos. And if this recognition doesn’t have a profound effect on even our most mundane interactions with the world around us, I don’t know what will.’

Living in God’s Creation: Orthodox Perspectives on Ecology

(St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009)