

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Pope Francis & Saint Francis of Assisi

Pope Francis chose as his namesake the 800 year old Saint Francis of Assisi. Earlier this year, he said that he chose Saint Francis because he was, "the man of poverty, the man of peace, and the man who loves and protects creation." The latest encyclical of Pope Francis, "Laudato Si", (Praise Be), expresses the Pope's love of creation, a love inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi and his devotion to those who love and protect creation.

As a Sister of Saint Clare, I am a Franciscan. Saint Clare was one of the first women followers of Saint Francis. My earliest memory of Saint Francis was of his simplicity. He was a saint who was friendly and loveable.

There were statues of him in gardens outside where we played. G. K. Chesterton, author and essayist, wrote in his biography of Saint Francis, "If Saint Francis is said to be like Christ, then Christ must ... be just so much like Saint Francis." Saint Francis emphasized that we not only worship Jesus as divine, but that we imitate and love his humanity.

In Pope Francis' encyclical "Laudato Si'" he says, "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." The Pope points out that we have Saint Francis actually loving our earth as a family, calling earth our mother and sister. We share the same DNA of life with all the created world. These bonds of

love are created because we have the same eternal source - God who is our Father. Earth was not only a kindred spirit to Saint Francis, but he fell in love with creation. He saw in creation the manifestation of the glory of the Divine creator.



Noah's Ark

The Pope is calling for a "new beginning" in our relationships to each other and creation. He uses the Biblical story of the whole earth destroyed by a flood except for the actions of one just man, Noah. He says that this story is an example for our times. The Pope writes that we are destroying our common home, the earth, and he is calling for just people to act.

As Noah built an ark to protect the animals from the destruction of the flood, we are to begin anew to protect our planet. Pope Francis calls out to the church to acknowledge that what is happening to the earth, our "common home," is "unprecedented in the history of humanity." His voice sounds the alarm for us "to become painfully aware" of what is happening and "to discover what each of us can do about it". We are called to be as concerned about the earth as we would be about a serious illness of a member of our family.

He describes our current times - as people living a "more intensified pace of life and work" which he calls "rapidification". We know this is true. I have heard myself and others say, "Where does the time

go?" "I am so busy." We have a sense that our lives are racing out of control. Even retired people will say that they are busier now than when they were working. This speeding up of our lives is in sharp contrast to the slow pace of biological evolution.

If we are to be more like Saint Francis, we must seek to measure our lives not by what we can achieve, but by how much we can love and protect our planet. New technological advances entice us to see exciting possibilities. But our world cannot sustain our thoughtless consumerism and our "throw-away" culture. The environmental cost to our vital resources of air, water and soil degrades both our planet and the future of our humanity.



Pope Francis' bold revolution calls for a new way of thinking, a new way of designing policies and educational programs, and a new life-style and spirituality that will resist the assault of our speeded-up way of life. We need a new attitude and a new way of life to preserve our planet. We need to fall in love again with each other and the beauty of this planet. We need a conversion.

The Pope says, "Saint Francis is an example of personal conversion, which recognizes our errors, sins, faults and failures, and leads to a heartfelt repentance and desire to change". Saint Francis' conversion was a change of heart. A conversion of heart leads to an inner conviction, not just about

what we do or how we do something. It is a change in the way we see ourselves. In this case it is also a change in the way we see the earth. It is a change in the way we see our relationship with the earth. This is the conversion he is setting before us.

We must begin now to care and love our "mother, sister earth". Start today to reuse, reduce and recycle. By making choices to care for sister earth we become aware of our consumerism and consumption. We can reduce our appetite for more digital items, we can use them longer, and we can recycle them properly to protect our landfills. We can decide now to help our sister earth heal.

By invoking the faith and simplicity of Saint Francis, the Pope shows us how to live from the deepest place of our faith -- our care and love for one another and the planet. The Pope calls each of us to be a lover of all people and our planet, to gaze at the beloved, and to dream of a new form of life together. We can then play and dance with joy and praise in wonder and awe before such a wonderful world. In this way we will be seeing our beloved earth as did Saint Francis of Assisi so long ago.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

Sr. Laura and Sisters

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