



# *Apostles for Today*

*Prayer and Reflection - April 2016*

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## *Living God's Mercy with all of creation*

The theme of this reflection is very much close to my heart and linked to my cultural roots. I grew up in direct contact with nature and we fed ourselves with the fruits of the earth. I have always admired its diversity and beauty. I remember that when I saw the Atlantic for the first time, I could not hold my emotions back, saying: God made you! I had a similar experience when I found myself, as a missionary, within the planet's largest "Biodiversity Sanctuary", the Amazon.

Today I live in the beautiful city of Rome, full of life, history, beauty, culture, tourists and pilgrims, but at the same time, chaotic and polluted, receiving thousands of brother and sister immigrants and refugees. Having fled from wars often provoked by economic interests and human exploitation. We are also afraid of the threat of terrorism in its increasingly extreme manifestations throughout the world.

Within this panorama we are called, as Pallottine Family in the Church, to live God's mercy and take care of all creation. A theme which is at the centre of Pope Francis' reflections, and is also a cause of concern for the UN, for non-governmental organizations, for scientists, theologians, churches, families and individuals. It is proper concern for our common home.

The biblical message regarding creation is fundamentally positive. Creation is the first act of God's love. Everything flows from this source of life and being which is God himself, as from the womb of a mother. Seven times we are told that what God had done is good and beautiful, the last time concluding with "God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good" (Gn 1:31) and the first song to the Lord's merciful love was born from contemplating the work of Creation: "Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, for his mercy it is everlasting" (Ps 117).

God created man and woman and has woven a dialogue of friendship with them. He put all of creation in their hands to be protected and cultivated, and one of the most beautiful, joyful and liberating things given to us is to contemplate the work of creation, and ourselves within it. To feel ourselves to be "creatures", objects of the Creator's loving and provident concern, situates us in our right place before God, in true, joyful humility, full of gratitude and able to assume the responsibilities that He entrusts to us with the gift of life.

The human vocation will, therefore, be understood in terms of the cultivation and safekeeping of a precious reality which is beloved by God. On the other hand,

“keeping” means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving’ In this sense, every community “can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations” (Laudato Si (LS) n. 67).

This, therefore, is a privileged field for the exercise of a merciful dominion over creation on our part and that of all humankind; for good administration expressed in caring practices; to make concrete that good news which is at the heart of the Gospel for the earth and for humanity itself.

As image and likeness of God, we are called to be the manifestation of God’s glory in the world and dialogue partners of God on earth before all creation. Only we can assume a conscious attitude of respect for nature. Only in us can an integral and merciful ecological conscience emerge.

For the first time, we are facing an ecological crisis of planetary proportions caused primarily by human activity. In addition, we are convinced that essential natural resources for life and human dignity are under a “universal social mortgage” (cf. John Paul II, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* n. 42): since the earth is ultimately a common heritage, its fruits are for the benefit of all. The land contains resources that, while limited, are still sufficient for all humanity.

Protecting the environment is a challenge for all of us and we are called to listen to the cry of the earth and of the poor who are desperate. Technical and scientific advances can contribute greatly to humanising the world, but can also be instruments of destruction and death. If technical progress is not matched by corresponding progress in human ethical formation and integral growth, it ceases to be progress, and becomes a threat for humanity and for the world. Integral ecology requires a "reconnection" of scientific and technical progress with ethics. When we human beings approach the environmental issue, we must assert the primacy of ethics over technology, from which comes the need to always safeguard human dignity.

Consumerism and the wasting of resources, which leave much of the human population in misery, are opposed to any sound ecologically integral ethical option. The elimination of poverty is one of the first steps that human beings can take to solve ecological problems. An “ecological conversion” of individuals and peoples is required this to happen, especially of those who have an abundance of wealth.

The destruction of the environment and ecological problems are rooted to a great extent in a blurring of people’s ethical awareness. In this way some elements of this ecological crisis reveal their moral character.

Thus, the ecological crisis gives us the opportunity for a radical critique of how we are organising the production of goods and human coexistence. It also indicates a new paradigm in the relationship between nature and humans. It is necessary to point to a new way of living and thinking, not merely to conceive of nature only as a resource to be exploited. In this respect an ecological conversion is needed, whereby

human beings cease to see themselves simply as isolated individuals, but rather as part of a whole, capable of natural and social interrelations. This self-understanding leads to an ethical and spiritual conversion which generates behaviour and attitudes of respect, of self-restraint, of just measure, and of solidarity with nature and with other human beings.

From here comes the awareness that solutions must be generated and developed within ourselves, since the best way to respect nature is to promote an “integral human ecology” open to transcendence. Respect for human beings and for nature has a complementary reciprocity. The primary ecology is to defend “human ecology”. If “human ecology” goes well, all creation will benefit. In fact, the ecological crisis arises almost always from our spiritual and social deserts.

A full and merciful ecology requires an effective change of mentality which propels us to adopt new lifestyles. These lifestyles should be marked by personal and social sobriety, temperance and self-discipline. It is necessary to escape from the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of production which respect the order of creation and which satisfy the needs of all. Such an attitude encourages a renewed awareness of the interdependence which binds all of the inhabitants of the earth together. This invites us to be agents of change of the structural causes which generate such behaviour. In this regard, the formation of conscience and of an integral spirituality have a fundamental role.

We are called to relinquish an aggressive way of life and instead prize kindness, caring relationships and the value of the dignity of others. Integral human ecology not only reveals the relationship between the human person and the environment, but also the relationship of each person with him- or her-self and with the Creator. Duties towards the environment flow from those towards the person, considered in him- or her-self and in relation to others.

All of this also requires a response at the level of spirituality, inspired by the belief that creation is a gift that God has placed in the responsible hands of human beings for their use, recognition, gratitude and loving care. Nature presents itself to our eyes as the imprint of God, as a place in which his creative, providential and redemptive power is revealed. For this to be possible, we need to help one another to rediscover our connection with God and the mission given to us to be “shepherd and guardian” of ourselves, of others and of all creation. The new creation in Christ and the continuous creation reveal that nothing of what exists in this world is indifferent to the creating and redeeming plan of God.

Certainly, as a family inspired by St. Vincent Pallotti, who makes our being created in the image and likeness of God the foundation of our common vocation, we can help to put in place a new style of life and new missionary perspectives and sing the mercy God with all creatures.

## From our Founder, St. Vincent Pallotti:

*“Ab my God, faith reminds me that You are infinite Goodness and, as such, are infinitely diffusive, and with infinite love from all Eternity you have mercifully decreed the ineffable Work of the Creation of the entire Universe to spread in your creatures all of Yourself, eternal, infinite, immense, incomprehensible. [...] Ab my God, faith reminds me that you have carried out the loving Decree of Creation, and that before creating human beings, you created Heaven and Earth, and in Heaven the Angels, and on earth everything visible [...] in service of human beings, so that everything needed for the necessities of the present life be provided to be used as much as is needed to attain our final single Blessed End”* (OCC XIII, pp. 30-31).

*“Human beings are created, as Holy Faith teaches us, in the image and likeness of God, God who is charity in essence, and therefore human beings are living images of divine charity according to the essence of their creation: and since God, being charity in essence in his external operations is always attentive towards human beings and was so to the point of sending his Only Begotten Son to redeem the human race by his death on a Cross, so human beings must imitate God according to their possibilities through the effectiveness of their works by loving their neighbour, which includes everyone of every condition, country, nation etc. capable of knowing God and, therefore, human beings according to the essence of their creation cannot exempt themselves from the precept of charity”* (OCC IV, pp. 172-3).

## For personal and community reflection:

*“The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone. If we make something our own, it is only to administer it for the good of all. If we do not, we burden our consciences with the weight of having denied the existence of others. That is why the New Zealand bishops asked what the commandment “Thou shall not kill” means when “twenty percent of the world’s population consumes resources at a rate that robs the poor nations and future generations of what they need to survive”* (LS n. 95).

- Do we really consider the good things which we have as a gift from God which we are called to share and use for the good of all?
- In what ways and to what extent do we live out the consequences of this in our daily lives as individuals, as families, as communities?
- What practical steps are we willing to take as individuals, as families, as communities, as NCCs and LCCs, to protect the environment and to respond to the cry of the poor?

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