

Pastoral Letter for the launch of Brentwood Diocesan Laudato Si' Invitations, Commitments and Actions

27th Sunday of Year B (conclusion of the Season of Creation)

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In today's first reading, from the Book of Genesis, we heard about the creation of Eve, from the rib of Adam. In the Gospel Jesus tells us, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the Kingdom of God belongs."

These two images chime deeply with this pivotal moment in the life of our planet. God's creation was gifted to us in that same Book of Genesis. Adam and Eve are asked to "till" and "keep" the earth – to steward it, care for it, and cherish it. Yet as we consider the children in the Gospel, so precious in Jesus' sight, we have to ask ourselves what kind of world we are handing on to our children, and children yet unborn? This summer has seen wild fires raging in Southern Europe, traumatic flooding in India, Pakistan and America, and a devastating earthquake in Haiti. There can be no doubt that weather patterns are shifting, and it is the poorest people in the world who are often the ones that are suffering the most.

So how can we respond? Our faith roots us in a Biblical landscape full of natural images – lakes and mountains, fish and sheep, fig trees and olive groves, wheat and lambs. Pope Francis says, "The Lord was ... in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder." The Pope wrote those words in 2015, in a letter addressed to the whole world. It is called *Laudato Si'* and these are the first words of a prayer of St Francis of Assisi – they translate as, *Praise Be*.

"Praise Be to brother sun and sister moon," writes St Francis as he continues referring to all creation as brother and sister. In those simple words he reminds us that we are all inter-connected. St Thomas Aquinas, the great Philosopher and Theologian, said "In every living creature there is a trace of the Trinity." In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis draws together these centuries of prayer and wisdom, and asks us urgently to "Listen to the Cry of the Earth, and the Cry of the Poor."

Now, in the autumn of 2021, we find ourselves at a moment which will define how human beings respond to the challenges of Climate Change. In less than a month world leaders gather in Glasgow, and the decisions they make will affect us all. So today you are receiving information about what the Diocese is doing, and what you are invited to do, as individuals and as a parish. As part of this, each of us are asked to make three personal pledges, three ways in which we will act differently. This is not just another environmental campaign; it is an integral part of our faith. In making your personal pledges – in working to heal the planet, and in striving for justice for the poorest people in the world – you are a living witness to Jesus Christ: do not be afraid to tell people why you are doing whatever you choose to do.

Let me now offer some very personal words. I have been deeply blessed in my life to explore mountains, often in Scotland. Mountains are part of the Biblical landscape, where they are places of encounter with God. For me, they are places where I see the immense scale, detail, force and wonder of God's creation. There are moments when I have savoured the stillness and peace of an unparalleled view from a mountain peak. I sense God, and such moments inspire me to pray. So as I see the destruction of God's creation due to the effects of climate change, I take the pledges that I make today very seriously. *I will be eating less meat; I will be walking more often; I will be praying much more regularly on the challenges to God's Creation and the urgent issues around climate change.*

Today, I am also mindful of my role as Shepherd of the Diocese. It is a feature of our Church that much good work can remain hidden. This weekend, unusually, we are shining a light on what we do, so that you know about it and can share it. For over thirty years Brentwood Diocese has firmly refused to invest in tobacco or weapons manufacturers, into addition to those who produce pornography, or those who make chemical products that go against our teaching that all life is sacred. Now we have added to this; in the last three months we have divested completely from companies that produce or trade fossil fuel. In 2018 we became an employer that pays the real living wage, lifting families from poverty. The electricity and gas used in almost all our Diocesan buildings now comes from renewable sources.

To reinforce these Diocesan actions, and our personal pledges, today I urgently encourage every school and parish to work towards the Cafod *LiveSimply* award; this will have a great effect across East London and Essex. The Diocese is full of natural beauty, and we can help to enhance that, creating new havens for wildlife, volunteering with local charities, and growing fruit and vegetables on our land. Personally, I am very pleased to be helping to lead work which will seriously examine our use of energy in the Diocese, most especially in our buildings, and you will hear more about that in your own parish during 2022.

In an interview, Mother Teresa, now a Saint of our Church, was once asked about how her work with the poorest people in Calcutta could possibly make a difference, as there were so many of them. She replied, "Is what I am doing to serve the poor just a drop in the ocean? Yes. It is. But many drops make a different ocean."

Our personal pledges are drops in the ocean – but there are, at least, over 45,000 committed Catholics in our Diocese. That's 135,000 pledges! Making sacrifices; listening to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor. In this way, in the name of Jesus Christ, we can help to make a different ocean.

I ask you, with me, to offer it all in prayer:

"Teach us afresh, Lord, to care for our common home in the way that you care for us
Teach us afresh, Lord, to see 'a trace of the Trinity' in every part of creation
Teach us afresh, Lord, the precious truth that each person we meet
is a sister or brother of your Son, Jesus Christ."

Yours in Christ and Mary,

Bishop Alan Williams, sm