



Pope Francis on "Our Common Home" II

In the final chapter of his encyclical *Laudato Si* Pope Francis highlights the role of Jesus Christ in "ecological conversion." The Son of God "has taken unto himself this material world and now, risen, is intimately present to each being" by his divine power. The victorious Son of Mary "comes not from above, but from within; he comes that we might find him in this world of ours."

We can find the God-Man here because we can recognize him as one with a body like our own. "The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home," Pope Francis teaches. "The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter," the Holy Bread of Life, which he gives us in Communion to confirm the God-given dignity of human life in the body. Therefore, the Pope says, "Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology." But to respect my body to the full means I must care for every other embodied human life too, as well as the complex natural world that sustains it. "Thus the Eucharist . . . direct[s] us to be stewards of all creation," Pope Francis says; for in the Mass "[t]he world which came forth from God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration" as "an act of cosmic love."

But the Eucharist is always *both matter and meal*. Jesus' body forever links him to the

material universe, but he took a body to make himself bread. He gave us the Eucharist to satisfy our *hunger*, and he told us to go and do likewise, to bring bread to the hungry and good news to the poor. Thus does "the day of rest, centered on the Eucharist," inspire "us to greater concern for nature and for the poor." It inspires us to "ecological conversion." For "we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation [which] affects the most vulnerable people on the planet" with hunger and thirst.

Eucharistic ecological conversion brings other issues into focus as well. "It is clearly inconsistent to combat trafficking in endangered species while remaining completely indifferent to human trafficking" (into which people are often driven by hunger), the Pope observes. Another striking inconsistency occurs when proponents of environmental integrity, "rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, . . . fail to apply those same principles to human life" and "justify transgressing all boundaries when experimentation is carried out on living human embryos." This raises a profound ecological question: "How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings . . . if we fail to protect a human embryo . . . ?" In "the 'culture of waste,'" the Holy Father said in May 2013, "people are thrown aside as if they were trash." Unwanted frozen embryos are mouths we are unwilling to feed.

The Bread of the Eucharist is a healing remedy for all that hardens the human heart against the hunger of the poor. In St. Luke's account of the Multiplication of the Loaves, twelve baskets of broken bread are left over.

“Twelve is the number of the tribes of Israel,” Pope Francis recalls; “it represents symbolically the whole people. And this tells us that when the food was shared fairly, with solidarity, no one was deprived of what he needed, every community could meet the needs of its poorest members.”