

Care for life includes creation

By Sr. Constance Veit, I.S.P.

Pope Francis' environmental encyclical, *Laudato Si*, has generated a great buzz.

I have to admit that I haven't always taken enough interest in ecological issues, assuming that doing so would somehow compromise my dedication to the frail seniors with whom we share our lives as Little Sisters of the Poor.

However, the pandemic opened my mind to ecological concerns in surprising ways.

During periods of COVID lockdown, like the one we have been experiencing throughout September, it struck me that our Home for the elderly and the people who live and work here is an ecosystem of our own.

But we are not a world unto ourselves! We are connected to many people and systems on whom we rely to sustain our daily lives.

This realization has led me to broaden my horizons – and to care more about our “common home.”

Regardless of whether we believe that the COVID-19 virus originated in a lab or a wet market, at this point it seems obvious that the pandemic is the result of some form of human intrusion into the natural world. Whatever its origin, the pandemic has shown us very painfully that we mere humans do not have absolute control over the world.

I am reminded of Pope Francis' homily of March 27, 2020, when he stood alone in an empty, rain-filled St. Peter's Square to pray for our sick world.

“We have gone ahead at breakneck speed, feeling powerful and able to do anything,” he said.

“Greedy for profit, we let ourselves get caught up in things, and lured away by haste. We did not stop at your reproach to us, we were not shaken awake by wars or injustice across the world, nor did we listen to the cry of the poor or of our ailing planet. We carried on regardless, thinking we would stay healthy in a world that was sick.”

As I have become more aware of our mistaken notion of dominance over the entire created world, I realize more and more that care for the environment is closely tied to reverence for human life.

A beautiful prayer from the U.S. Bishops' Conference (USCCB) drove this home to me. It begins like this: “Father of all, Creator and ruler of the universe, you entrusted your word to us as a gift. Help us to care for it and all people, that we might live in right relationship – with You, with ourselves, with one another and with creation.”

The prayer continues, “Christ Our Lord, ... help us to imitate your love for the human family by recognizing that we are all connected – to our brothers and sisters around the world, to those in poverty impacted by environmental devastation, and to future generations.”

It concludes by asking God to hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth, so that we may together care for our common home.

In October, the church observes Respect Life Month. It now seems fitting to me that the “Season of Creation,” this relatively new ecumenical effort that takes place each September, runs right into the month devoted to nurturing respect for human life.

Reflecting on our situation here at our Home for the elderly, I realize that many of us are not in a position to engage in great works of activism on these issues. But there is much we can do, and two of our greatest Catholic saints – both of whom we honor during the first week of October – can lead the way.

St. Francis of Assisi, whose feast day is October 4, often said, “Preach the Gospel at all times; use words if necessary.”

The great saint of nature teaches us how much good we can do through our example and witness to the Gospel. Even if we are financially strapped or physically frail, we can all give good example through charity to our neighbor and good stewardship of the created world!

St. Therese of Lisieux, whom we celebrate on October 1, believed that “God is our fulcrum: our lever, prayer; with that we can lift the world!”

So, no matter what material riches, influence or human strengths we lack, let’s offer our prayers and sufferings for greater reverence for the dignity of human life at every stage, and for greater concern for our common home. We really can make a difference!

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