

Homily for the re-launch of the Parish Live Simply Programme for 2018-2019

The Scriptures at Mass today are mainly about family life, especially the importance of faithfulness in marriage. Copies of a homily about the teaching of the church on this subject are available in the porch/narthex. The second part of the Gospel relates how precious children are Lord's eyes and there are copies of a recent homily on this subject also to be found in the church porch/narthex.

Today we re-launch our Parish Live Simply programme so it is appropriate to remind ourselves of the reasons for our engagement in this process. It is a way in which all the members of our families at home, and our parish community in its several churches and localities, can come closer together, cooperating for the welfare of the poor of the earth and for the benefit of our fellow creatures and our planetary home.

On Friday (October 4th) we celebrated the Feast of St Francis who can be regarded as the patron saint of all creation because he recognised the presence and the power of God in all creatures. As you know, our Holy Father Pope Francis used the opening words of this saint's famous hymn - *Laudato Si* - in 2015 as the title of his special letter to everyone on the planet about our responsibility for each other's welfare and the protection of our common home. Our *Live Simply* Programme is the way in which we are responding as a parish to the Pope's Appeal in that Letter in which - to summarise - he makes the following important points:

*The earth is God's gift to us. It is full of beauty and wonder, and its fruits belong to everyone. But what we see today is that our Common Home has never been so hurt and mistreated as it has been in the last two hundred years. We have developed at a greater speed than we could ever have imagined. We have treated the earth as if it has an unlimited supply of resources, taking more than our fair share from most people on the planet as well as from future generations to come. We have stripped the earth of its natural forests and contaminated the earth's waters, its land and its air. Plants and animal species are becoming extinct at an alarming rate.

The earth, our common home, is beginning to look more and more like an *immense pile of filth*. Our increasing use of polluting fossil fuels especially coal, oil and gas, is helping to drive climate change - which is one of the biggest challenges we face today.

Climate change affects us all, but it is the poorest communities who suffer the most. We are now at crisis point, when the future of our earthly home is under threat. And despite this crisis there seems to be no slow-down in the life styles of the rich nations. Enormous gaps between the poor and the rich continue to rise; between those who are trapped in poverty with few or no resources and those who are consuming and wasting at an ever-increasing rate, leaving a trail of waste and destruction.

Our digital world is also polluting us with noise and distractions which stop us from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply, and to love generously. Real interpersonal communication is being replaced with virtual friendships which we can choose to accept or reject, and making us dissatisfied with true, deep relationships, or which can give rise to new sense of isolation.

Yet despite all of this, all is not lost. Many among us, especially young people and children, are calling for change. They want to build a better future which takes seriously the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the poor. We can change; we can make a new start.

To protect our common home we need a common plan. The whole human family needs to work together so that we may sow beauty not pollution and destruction. Our use of polluting fossil fuels needs to be replaced without delay, and we need to stop treating the world's resources as an object of profit with no thought as to how our actions may affect the environment or the well being of future generations.

We need to put love for our world and love for our neighbour into action by living together in greater harmony; by listening to one another, caring for nature, and getting involved in movements of reform and renewal. We need to undergo an 'eco-conversion' in which we listen to the *cry of the earth and the cry of the poor*. This means taking seriously things like avoiding the use of plastic; reducing the waste of water; separating our rubbish; and using public transport more often as part of our calling to protect creation.

But more urgently we need to slow down on how much we consume and throw away. We can find great joy in living 'simply', rather than always being on the lookout for what we do not have and acquiring it as soon as we can, building up a storehouse of so called 'treasures' *which moth and rust consume and which thieves break in and steal* (Matt 6:19). We are capable of all these changes and of making a new start. So let's start (again) today.*

At the outset of our Parish Live Simply Programme you may remember that we conducted a survey of our attitudes and practices which revealed to some extent where we then stood on these important matters. For over a year we have tried to address all these issues at our churches, at our schools, and in our homes. There has been a commendable engagement which we celebrated at Masses throughout the Parish last July.

We plan to conduct another survey in the New Year prior to our submission to Cafod to be designated as a Live Simply Parish. The response to that survey will, hopefully, clearly indicate our determination to continue to Live Simply, Sustainably, and in Solidarity with the Poor.

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* With acknowledgements to *Cafod - Resources, Live Simply Programme*.