



March 2021

WORLDWIDE EDUCATION

From the Book of Wisdom of Solomon (13,1-9)

The natural foolishness of men is seen in ignorance of God; the experience of good things did not lead them to the knowledge of Him who is.

They were interested in his works, but they did not recognise the author of them. But they held that either fire, or wind, or air, or the sphere of the stars, or rushing water, or the lights in the sky were the rulers of the world. If charmed by such beauty, they took them for gods, let them know how far superior is their sovereign, for the original source of beauty fashioned them.

And if they were impressed by their power and activity, let them understand from this how much mightier is he who formed them.

For the grandeur and beauty of creatures lead us to ponder on their Author, greater and more magnificent. No doubt, these men are not to be blamed severely, for perhaps they went astray, only in their search for God and in their desire to find him.

They pondered over the created things that surrounded them, and were captivated by the sight of such beauty.

Even so they are not to be excused for, if they so far succeeded in knowledge and were able to explore the world, why did they not discover first the world's first Sovereign?

From a letter of Padre Pio to Giuseppina Morgera (*Dolcissimo Iddio*)

*Most beloved daughter of Jesus,
May the grace of Jesus always be in your heart and always make you advance in the secret ways of divine love. So be it.*

With how much joy of the soul I received your last one, I cannot tell you. I admire your life entirely spent on health and the sanctification of souls and I cannot help but exclaim: "Blessed be God who hides these things to the wise of this century, and only deigns to reveal them to the humble, to the little ones before worldly men".

I have nothing left but to urge you to progress further in these holy initiatives as you can and not to fear the criticisms that the evil ones will make of you. Your only intention is to glorify the divine Spouse of souls in all, as well as your own and others' sanctification. By working in this way, you will prove yourself as a true follower of the Nazarene who for the sake of our health and to let us know his divine Father wanted to come down from heaven to earth.

The more difficulties you will encounter in this holy ministry, the more you must convince yourself that it is appreciated by the divine Majesty. It is indisputably certain that all holy initiatives displease our common enemy and therefore he in all his power endeavours that we desist doing the good.

Therefore live quietly and always go forward, and let the Holy Spirit who is spread in your heart operate.

CATECHESIS

A question: how can we work to renew the earth?

In the last catechesis we spoke of the importance of going beyond discouragement and pessimism; we must realise that even now the Church is living the power of the Spirit and that the Lord sends each of us to renew the earth, this earth of today, that in which we live.

Christians and ecology

The attitudes of Christianity towards the earth, understood in the broadest sense, as a created reality, inhabited and lived in by man, were, over the centuries, the most varied. Undoubtedly, one experience that closely links faith with creation is that of St. Francis and his *Canticle of Creatures*; in those words resounds a fundamental page of our theology: namely that God is the creator of the world. In spite of this, even amongst Christians there have been those who - in the wake of scientific progress or economic interests - have not always had respect for creation and with great ease from the idea of fertilizing and improving the earth have passed to an exploitation and a decay which has led to the current conditions of global ecological crisis. What has been the Christian's attitude? In the best of situations they have adapted to the ways of the majority; it is enough to think that only recently talk has begun about ecological sins, the profanation of creation or we find someone who confesses having defaced the environment or who has not chosen properly. We still find it difficult to consider these things a sin.

But ecology is not just an environmental problem: it passes through the body and through our history, so much so that Pope Francis speaks of "integral ecology". The Pope introduces this term with a fundamental premise that closely concerns our Christian existence: everything is connected, everything is related. Before looking at the relationship with creation, this concept concerns the relationship with our person: we often set ourselves goals, make choices, or - more simply - we have a vision of ourselves, which is independent of our body, it's emotions. or it's ability and possibility. Spiritual growth and prayer life itself depend on a good relationship with ourselves and with our body. We know well that a disordered life, the inability to make sacrifices, the very habit of sin, but also the desire to forge ahead, are to the detriment of spiritual growth, because they mark that internal division (lack of a relationship between principles and real life) that Jesus summarizes with the words: "One cannot serve two masters" (Lk 6.13).

Integral ecology becomes a mission

If we start from the relationship with ourselves, the ecological problem is no longer just an environmental issue of great importance, but becomes a problem of faith which is necessary to confront. Pope Francis writes: "Today, the analysis of environmental problems is inseparable from the analysis of human, family, work and urban contexts, and from the relationship of each person with himself, which generates a determined way of relating to others and to the environment. There is an interaction between ecosystems and between the different worlds of social reference, and so it is demonstrated once again that "all is superior to the part" (*Laudato Si'*, n. 141).

Padre Pio's spiritual experience becomes a teacher for us in understanding, the importance of this message. When speaking of him, believers and non-believers alike are struck by what everyone calls the miracle of Casa Sollievo. A poor friar, sent to San Giovanni Rotondo known as the convent of the last resort for his health problems, often misunderstood and persecuted, was able to found such an important work of charity in an area that did not offer great economical possibilities for investments, not even a suitable staff to carry it out. Padre Pio brought to San Giovanni Rotondo not only "the stones", but the people, social and cultural growth of the territory, a professional change up to specialised people in many fields from construction to health and administration; which would have been useful to give rise to that hospital. He did all this by confessing and guiding consciences: the work of charity was not born from a highly structured business plan, but from people and hearts renewed internally, dedicated by faith to the service of charity. Without a doubt we can define Padre Pio's work as a concrete experience of that integral ecology encoded in *Laudato Si'*.

Attention to spiritual needs

According to Padre Pio those in need had to be looked after completely: here then, alongside the assistance to the sick, through Casa Sollievo, he promoted the human and spiritual formation of those, who were to assist them (we owe the first school for professional nurses of the province of Foggia to Padre Pio). Even the environment had to help the person: hence the hospital was elegant and luxurious which to some even seemed excessive, and he used to reply: "The sick are the brothers of Jesus, if I could I would overlay the walls of the Clinic with gold». And on the outside: on the bare mountain of the Gargano overlooking Casa Sollievo, the friar had thousands of trees planted so that the sick could have a different environment than the stony and inhospitable barren mountains of the Gargano. And again (or before everything) the presence of the Capuchin friars as chaplains and sisters of the Apostles of the Sacred Heart, for spiritual assistance to the staff and the sick.

Even in this we see the concept of Pope Francis prevailing: the part is inferior to the whole. One cannot cure a sick person without looking at him in his physical and spiritual reality. Each admission to hospital should not be just a clinical case, but those who were next to the sufferer were called firstly to be a motive of hope and light, even when that existence ends in death, for time went on towards eternity. For Padre Pio, that precise suffering moment, through the love of those close to the sick, would become a time of an even a greater love, that of God.

Missionaries to overcome the selfishness of man

The logics that animate our society go in a different direction: let's think of the land that seemed too small, so that large plans to limit birth was favoured, because of fear of being too restricted, of not being able to feed everyone (remember "politics of the only child" of some regimes). And also limited space of those who economically want it all for themselves, incapable of welcome and solidarity and disinterested in major environmental problems.

The Christian goes in a different direction, his priority is to build the kingdom of God, beyond the individualism and selfishness of man. In this perspective, he is called to address the reality that surrounds him as a world wanted and loved by God. Therefore it becomes important not only to make our own requests linked to eternal life, but also those of this land that belongs to him.

Unfortunately from this point of view we are still hesitant and have our own preconceptions. If a priest in church talks about emigration, he is said to be political; if he talks about ecology, he wants to be a scientist, while we were at church to hear the Gospel; if he denounces economic and exploitation problems he is a trade unionist.

At the end of the fifties, the friars of the convent of San Giovanni Rotondo decided to hire two servants to help in the kitchen, since the community was now numerous, there were often guests and the lay brother in charge was no longer able to do the cooking alone. It was a novelty that seemed a bit luxurious and the treasurer of the time took care to talk about it with Padre Pio, fearing his outburst. The reaction was very different: Padre Pio had nothing to object, understanding the problem, but recommended only one thing: "Don't skimp on the salary, give what everyone is entitled to and pay all the contributions (at the time there was the health insurance fund) and the other things that they have a right to". Today this is well established, but then we all know that it was easy to get around and adjust the rules to one's liking.

Being missionaries in the world means looking at it in its entirety and feeling the responsibility of educating the totality of ethical values, from family to social, economic and ecological ones. We need to learn to reconcile listening to the Word of God whilst listening to the earth, in order to achieve that integral ecology that makes us look at the world as the Kingdom of God.

Missionary men and women

Let's seriously consider the problem of ecology; talking about it in our meetings, it is not an option or a way of doing something modern, but a Christian duty. In our families we cannot speak of an ethereal and distant Kingdom of God, but we can help everyone to respect creation precisely, because behind it is a Creator.

PRAYER TO SAINT PIO BY MONSIGNOR LUIGI RENNA

Father Pio,
our brother and guide
I want to bless the Lord for your gifts.
In a mysterious way He marked you
with the wounds of your passion
so you may be a witness of His mercy
in the world.
Grant me a true conversion,
your protection for all those dear to me
and, if the Lord asks me,
to know how to carry my Cross.
I pray to you so that the power of the Gospel
may be for every man
a word of hope and salvation.
Bless with your wounded hand
the Church and our society,
grant that all men
be workers of solidarity and peace.