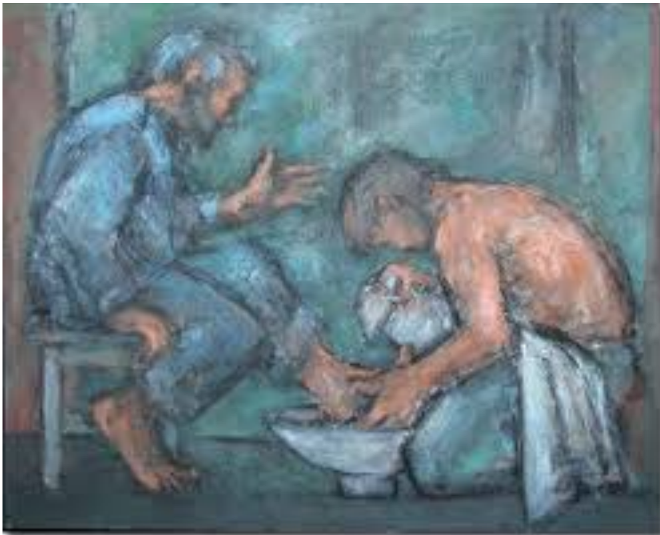
NOTRE DAME PARISH

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

"For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve..."



A simple test of character is the question: "Why?" Why does the candidate seek the power a political position holds? Why does the actor seek fame in Hollywood or on Broadway? Why does the business person seek wealth or the climb up the corporate ladder? Why does the person of faith seek a position of ministry?

There is nothing intrinsically wrong with ambition in any of these fields. In fact, most people use ambition to better themselves and their surroundings.

But the question must be asked: why do they seek? Do they want to wealth and fame and power for themselves alone? Or do they want to use these ambitions for the greater good? These were the questions Jesus asked his followers on the subject of ambition.

MASS INTENTIONS

Saturday, October 16 @ 4PM
Steve McDonald

Sunday, October 17 @ 9:30AM
Ruth Smith

Monday, October 18 @ 8AM
Deceased
Kazwara, Martonisi, & Szostaks

Tuesday, October 19 @ 8AM
Sara Rusboldt

Wednesday, October 20 @ 8:30AM
All School Mass, Bishop McClory presiding
Patrick McDonald

Thursday, October 21 @ 8AM
Ruth Smith

Friday, October 22 @ 8AM
Al Slattery

Saturday, October 23 @ 4PM
Joseph Moerschbaecher
Joan Langley's health

Let Us Pray

- For a fruitful Synod in the universal Church, our diocese, and our parish
- For the safety and health of children at Halloween events
- For the legitimate opening to human rights for girls and women in Afghanistan and elsewhere
- For detachment from the temptations of ambition and power in the Church
- For the recognition of the importance of just government for serving the common good
- For displaced peoples seeking security and livelihood at the borders of nations
- For the suppression of the coronavirus

Little Virtues Are Still Important

I suppose that, human nature being what it is, one generation is no more virtuous than another. Maybe I'm wrong. No matter. It seems to me that in recent years politics and the pandemic have unleashed a coarseness and anger that amounts to "Anything goes."

More and more women are using language as foul as what men never used to express in polite company. Children as young as three or four already have "attitude." Self-professed Christians and Catholics denounce their parish priests to bishops without dialogue, and pretend to theological expertise they do not possess.

A few U.S. bishops are going maverick against the papal magisterium's assurance that the vaccines are moral and ethical—and that vaccination is an act of charity (underlying health issues excepted).

School Boards in many places are contentious and nasty. Some airline passengers have become uncooperative in flight. Perhaps many of you, like I, can describe unpleasant encounters that seem outside the norm of daily civility.

In his writings, St. Francis de Sales described what have become known as the "little virtues." They now seem to have become "big virtues" given the growing incivility in our common life.

What are the little virtues?

Courtesy. Be polite.

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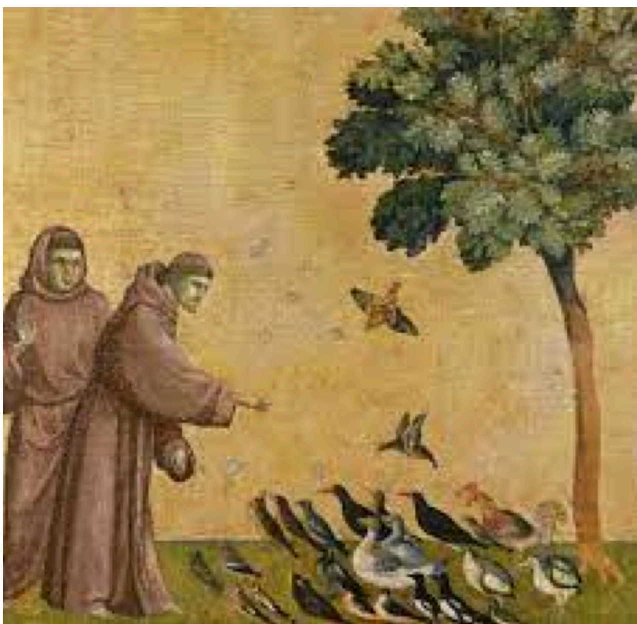
"There is nothing so strong as gentleness and nothing so gentle as real strength,"

Saint Francis de Sales

The Environment Is an Essential Part of Catholic Teaching



Pope Francis led dozens of religious leaders Oct. 4, 2021 in issuing a plea to protect the environment, warning that "Future generations will never forgive us if we miss the opportunity to protect our common home."

The appeal, which calls for net-zero emissions, was released after months of meetings leading up to the United Nations' November climate conference in Glasgow, Scotland.

The pope has voiced support for green policies before, including his 2015 encyclical letter to the entire Catholic Church "On Care for Our Common Home."

But Francis is not the first Catholic leader to emphasize care for the planet. In fact, every pope

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The Eucharist *should be* political

While the Eucharist should not be a partisan weapon, we must ask: What is the relationship between it and our politics?

Earlier this year, a lot of (sometimes misleading) controversy swirled around the question of abortion, Catholic politicians, and communion. This isn't a new question. There was plenty of discussion (and controversy) back in 2004 when John Kerry (a Catholic) ran for president. The Latin American bishops addressed it (again controversially) in their 2007 Aparecida document.

For many Catholics, all these debates seem out of place—we sometimes hear that we should not "politicize the Eucharist." And it's true that the Eucharist (or any Catholic activity) should not become a weapon in partisan battles about government. At the same time, putting the particular controversy aside, we should consider a deeper question: What is the relationship between this most sacred ritual of our Catholic faith and our moral and political practices? Here, we should immediately realize that there needs to be *some* connection! The Sunday Eucharist, as the "source and summit of the Christian life," according to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, must be related to the views we express and the choices we make the rest of the week. Otherwise, it's just an empty ritual or a practice that only has to do with the life to come.

But what is this relationship? The U.S. bishops have committed to a three-year Eucharist renewal to help Catholics understand and appreciate better what the Eucharist is. To understand the relationship between the Eucharist and our ethical lives, first we must have some sense of meaning of the Eucharist itself. There isn't a *single* meaning because the Eucharist is perhaps the densest, richest ritual of our faith. It's rich with many layers of meaning. We often think first about the real presence of Christ, a commitment that became especially important for Catholicism in contrast to Protestantism. It's really the body and blood of Christ. But how does that get us to thinking about its relationship to the moral life and social justice?

More helpful is to place the Eucharist in its liturgical setting—in the Mass—and think about the two main things it is: a sacrifice and meal. We approach the altar and come to the table. These two meanings are meant to be combined, and we might see that more easily if we recognize a crucial time element: The sacrifice is a making present of the most important event of the past, and the meal is a making present of the ultimate and eternal future.

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The past is the sacrifice on the cross of Christ's own body and blood for our sins. The future is the great feast where all humanity is gathered as one family, healed of all division, fully united around the victorious Christ. In the Mass, we truly come to participate in this past and future. The sacrificed Christ and the victorious Christ are truly present to us.

What does this double image of sacrifice and feast tell us about our life in society? Here again the imagery is rich. The sacrifice requires a recognition that we are all sinners. From the opening of the liturgy ("Lord, have mercy") to the last words before we receive the Eucharist ("Lord, I am not worthy"), there is a recognition that we receive this forgiveness as a gift, not as something we earn.

This doesn't just mean "everyone makes mistakes." It means we should put away any semblance of pride or self-righteousness and do so especially by extending this forgiveness to others.

The parable of the debtor who is forgiven a great deal, then goes out and refuses to forgive a small debt owed to him (Matt. 18:23–35), can apply to much of our moral and social lives. Do we refuse to offer forgiveness to our enemies? Do we harbor resentment over sins of the past? Do we arrogantly hold ourselves to be "good people" trying to defeat "bad people"?

The feast dimension requires a recognition that we are all ultimately in solidarity with one another. The liturgy is a gathering that calls us to celebrate with all others. This is our hope for a communal, eternal life, so vividly explained by Pope Benedict XVI in his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi* (On Christian Hope) and so vividly exemplified by various actions of Pope Francis. The church is called as a whole to be, as the Second Vatican Council put it, the sacrament of the unity of the human race. Thus, we are called to put away any division that is a countersign to this unity. This is why racism and other forms of ethnic supremacy are so antithetical to the Eucharist

This is why St. Paul criticizes the Corinthians for allowing the community to be divided into economic classes with some fully satisfied and others hungry (1 Cor. 11:17–22). Yet this is also why the church is concerned about the advocacy of certain social policies, like the killing of vulnerable life, which seem to manifest inevitable and interminable division in the human family. Do we share the vision of God's kingdom coming on earth as it is in heaven? Or do we confuse that vision by going out from the Eucharist and refusing solidarity with others—the poor, the immigrant, the prisoner, the unborn.

If we reflect deeply on these two aspects of the Eucharist, we may ourselves have to reform our consciences and see how our participation fails to testify to what God has done *for* us (in the free gift of forgiveness) and what God is doing *through* us (in the unification of all humanity). We may even find "mortal sin," where we have cut ourselves off from God's true vision and truly followed our own paths away from that vision. These are occasions to see how important the sacrament of reconciliation is. Yet access to that sacrament depends on our purpose of reform. We must be committed to change our ways, to learn true humility and solidarity. We won't ever do that perfectly, but we must commit to trying, to aiming at that gratitude of the forgiven sinner and that longing for the communion of all the saints.

These reflections don't generate an obvious answer to the charged question of who should receive the Eucharist and who shouldn't. But they should help us see that it's a real question that actually confronts all of us once we recognize what we are really doing in our Sunday celebration. And most importantly, it should be clear that what we are doing in the Eucharist should have a lot to do with how we conduct our moral and political lives—to inspire us to live out our response to God's gracious activity in forgiving us and calling us to eternal communion as one family.

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for the past half-century – except John Paul I, who died after just one month in office – has addressed environmental issues in their official publications. As a scholar whose research focuses on the medieval Church, I see many of these concerns deeply rooted in the history of the Catholic tradition.

THE EARLY TRADITION

One of the basic beliefs of Christianity is that the material world was created directly by God, and thus fundamentally connected with God's goodness.

This is clearly expressed in the creation narrative in the book of Genesis, part of the sacred scripture shared by Christians and Jews. As God completes each element of the world – day, night, land, sea, etc. – he sees that "it was good." On the sixth day, when God creates human beings in God's own image, they are given "dominion" or "rule over everything that lives on the Earth.

Early Christians insisted that the beauty of creation reflected God's glory. But as Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, they had to defend this view of the basic goodness of creation when challenged by another religious viewpoint. This movement – called Gnosticism, from the Greek word meaning "knowledge" – taught that the physical world was created not directly by God, but by a lesser spiritual being, out of malice or ignorance. At best, the material world was a worthless distraction; at worst, an evil snare for human souls.

Gnostic teachers offered to teach their followers how to free their spirits from attachment to their physical bodies and the material world. In this way, after death they could return to the realm of spiritual reality and reunite with the divine.

Many theologians and bishops criticized this interpretation of their faith. Several wrote lengthy, detailed critiques of Gnostic teaching; at stake, they believed, was the salvation of souls.

The most prominent of these was St. Irenaeus of Lyons, who lived in the second century A.D. On Oct. 7, 2021, Francis announced that he would declare Irenaeus a "Doctor of the Church," a title reserved for saints whose writings have had a profound impact on the life of the Church.
In Irenaeus' *Treatise Against the Heresies,* a passionate defense of the teaching of the scriptures and apostles, he states that creation itself reveals God and God's glory; the only higher revelation is Jesus Christ himself.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, however, Western Christianity was left with a lingering suspicion of "worldly things," despite this early stress on the basic goodness of material creation.

THE BENEDICTINE TRADITION

By the third century, some Christians began to seek a life more fully focused on God by removing themselves from society to pray and work together in communal groups. This kind of monasticism swept across Western Europe during the medieval period.

The most influential of these monastic orders were the Benedictines, who balanced their lives between daily prayer services and work – which often involved agriculture and care of the surrounding environment. Each monk or nun pledged to remain at the same monastery for life, unless its abbot or abbess – the monk or nun in charge – ordered them to move to another. Because of this, Benedictines became known as "lovers of place."

Today, one Benedictine saint has become especially connected with environmental concerns: St. Hildegard of Bingen, who died in A.D. 1179. This German abbess was one of the most accomplished women of the Middle Ages. An expert on herbal medicines and botany, she also wrote religious plays, composed liturgical chants and hymns, and authored theological works and poems based on her mystical experiences. She insisted that God loved the Earth as a husband loves a wife, and espoused a kind of "green" theology, called *viriditas*, condemning the harm that human activity could do to nature.

Hildegard has been acclaimed as an unofficial patron saint of environmentalists. In

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2012, Pope Benedict XVI declared her a "Doctor of the Church," like Irenaeus.

THE FRANCISCAN TRADITION

St. Francis of Assisi, son of an Italian cloth merchant, has over the centuries become renowned for his love of the natural world. After time as a soldier and prisoner of war, Francis underwent a spiritual conversion. Rejecting his father's wealth, he chose to live a life of radical poverty and public preaching until his death in A.D. 1226. Early on, male members of his new mendicant movement, the Franciscians, took religious vows but traveled from town to town with no fixed residence, begging for food and lodging.

One of Francis' few documents is a poe*m, the Canticle of the Sun,* which lyrically expressed his belief in the kinship between human beings and the rest of the natural world. Even the Sun and the Moon are addressed as "brother" and "sister." And as he lay dying, it is said that he asked to be laid on the bare Earth.

Legends about his preaching and miracles circulated widely, and some involved his concern for animals, treating them with the same dignity as human beings. One story holds that he preached to birds and convinced a vicious wolf to live in peace with nearby townspeople.

In 1979, Pope John Paul II named St. Francis the patron saint of ecology because he "revered nature as a wonderful gift of God." And in 2015, Pope Francis used the first words of the Canticle of the Sun, *Laudatio si'*, to open his encyclical on the environment and serve as its official title.

Although often overshadowed by the notion that the material world is only a passing distraction, reverence for a creation deeply loved by God has also been an important part of Catholic tradition. Contemporary teaching on the environment is only its most recent expression.

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Cheerfulness. Look for the beauty of life.

Order. Live in the present moment, not tomorrow.

Time. Don't waste it abusively.

Sincerity. Mean what you say. Show no pretense.

Punctuality. Show consideration for others.

Speech. Exercise custody of one's tongue; don't swear, be loud or boisterous.

Kindness. Give of yourself.

Patience. It is the remedy to resentment, self-pity, and impulsiveness.

Tolerance. Accept others without judgment.

Integrity. Live what you profess to believe. Do not be a hypocrite.

Balance. Don't take yourself too seriously.

Gratitude. Treat everything as a gift rather than as something you are owed.

Throughout my life, I was given manuals that laid out these "little virtues." In first year high at Quigley South, we had a book of prayers called *The Young Seminarian.* In his holy Rule, Saint Benedict's Chapter 4 outlines what he called "The Tools of Good Works." They are 45 admonitions, all rooted in scripture, to build character and to energize the Christian life. I don't claim to have mastered them all—far from it—but every Christian ought to take a measure of his/her practical behavior from time to time.

Father Keith & Rocco